System

OWENSCORP

Issue No. 19 – £24 / €30 / $39

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2022 S/Sより
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イタリア　フィレンツェでハンドメイドで製作。

素材
ボディ: ソフトスムースカーフレザー
&プリント
持ち手:バンブー

サイズ
横幅26cm
高さ21cm
奥行き8.5cm

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GIORGIO ARMANI

Lynda Benglis by Juergen Teller

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I know love is dark work;

you have to get your hands dirty. If you hold back, nothing interesting happens. At the same time, you have to find the right distance between people. Too close, and they overwhelm you; too far and they abandon you. How to hold them in the right relation?"

VALENTINO

— Hanif Kureishi

UNOPENED MAIL

Today I finally felt like enough time had gone by, so I dealt with the unopened letter from my ex that's now been in my top desk drawer for two years. What was I afraid of? What was I dreading? What could be in that red envelope sent through the mail addressed in that loopy handwriting I can never forget? I'll tell you. It said, "This was both our faults, maybe mine more than yours, but what we had was real and can still be real again. Just leave this envelope in the front window, and should I see it, I will knock on your door." Two years two years! What was I thinking? So, without thinking, I bolted to lean the envelope up against the windowpane, propped up by a candlestick. I had to hurry, because if even a few lost seconds at this point might somehow impede a reunion. And now I sit here waiting. Did I wait too long? The clock ticks. I'm catching my breath. I hope the red paper never fades.

VALENTINO

— Douglas Coupland

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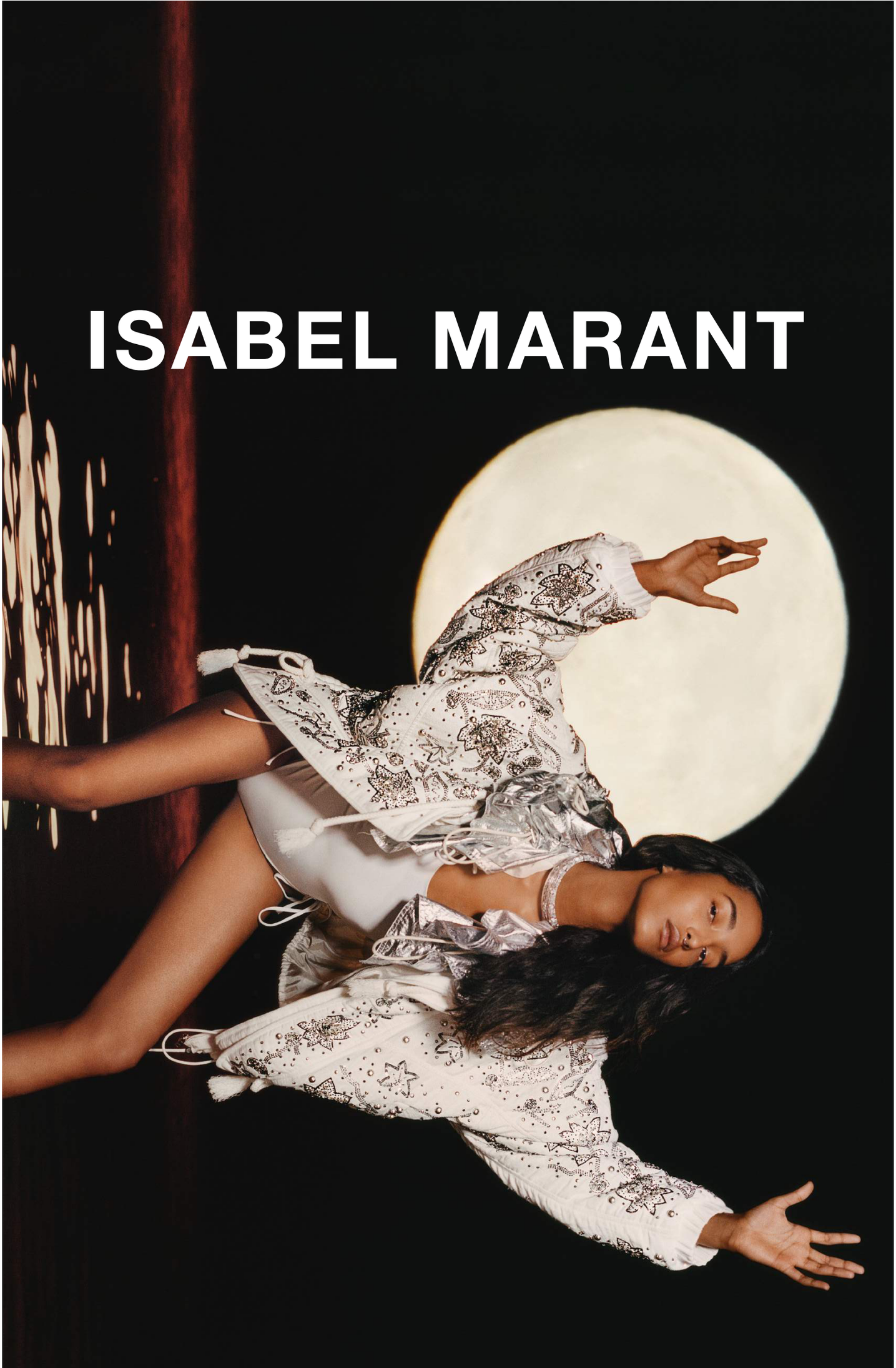
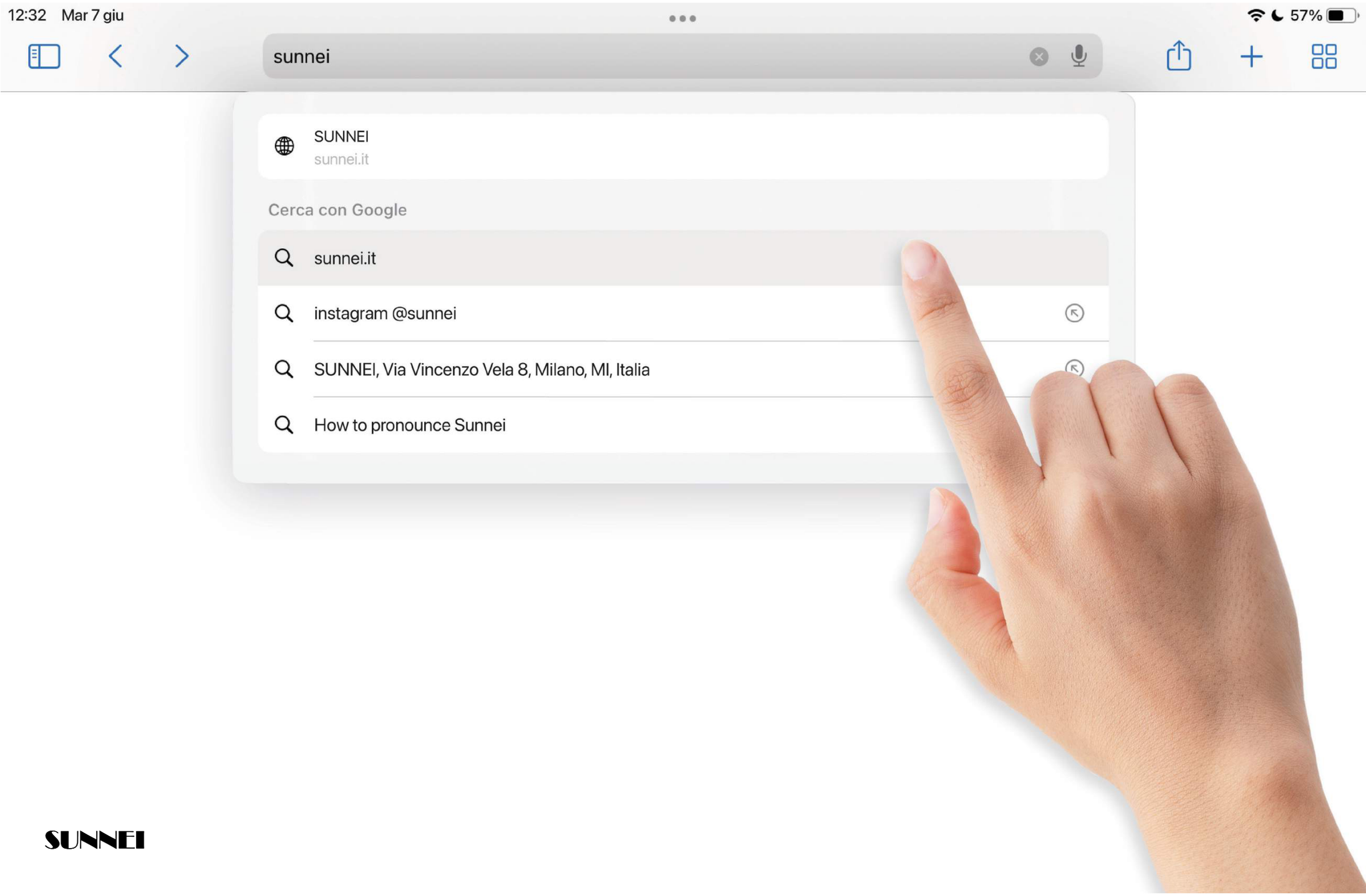


The Frankie Shop

Model: Lily McMenamy at Next. Photography: Pierre-Ange Carlotti. Styling: Paul Hamelline. Hair: Michael Delmas. Make-up: Hélène Vasnier. Creative Direction: System.

thefrankieshop.com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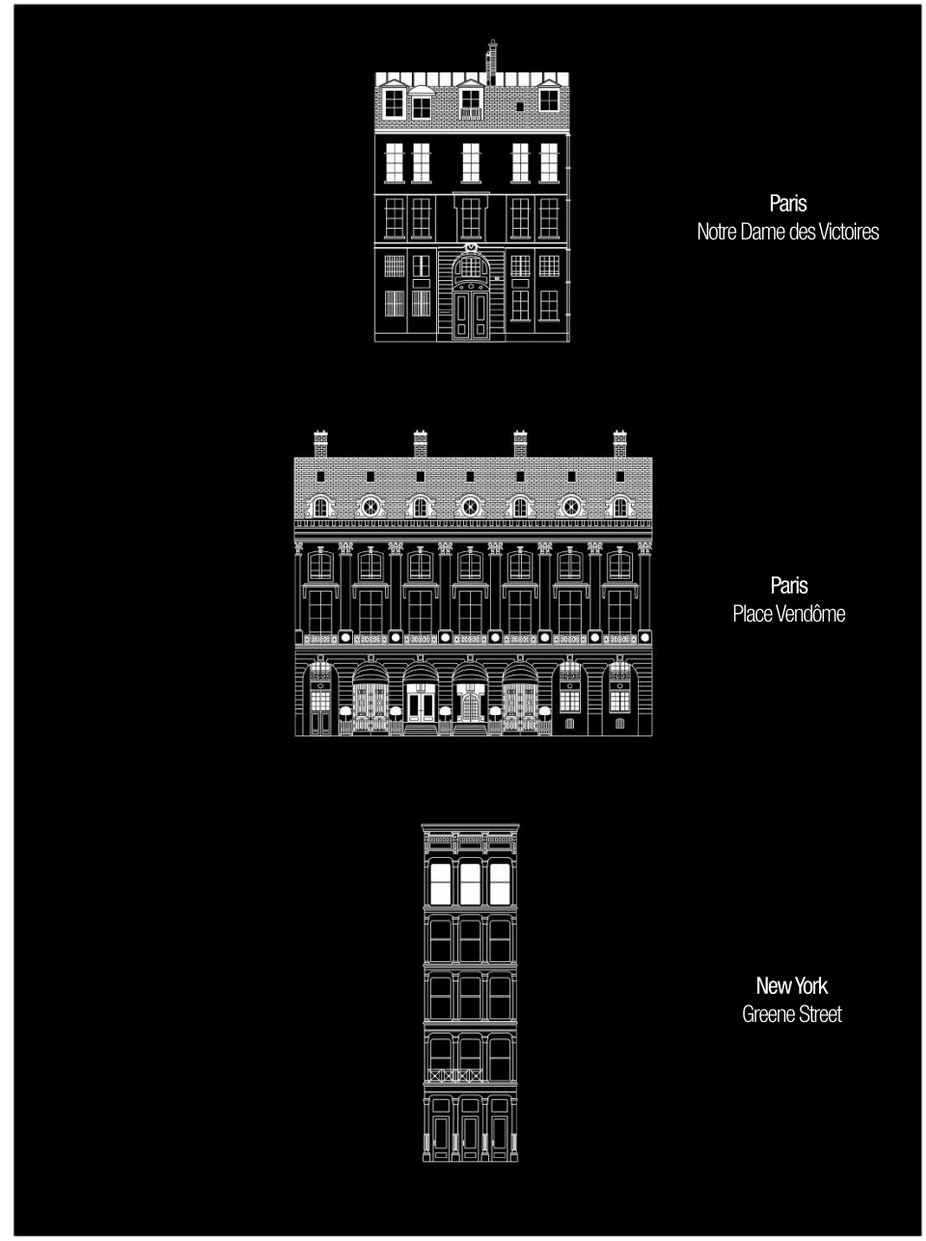
For the first time in 20 years, Rick Owens has recently been spending time in Porterville, California, the suburban town where he grew up. Ostensibly to care for his 88-year-old mother, inevitably, he's also been confronting his sometimes troubled past, and perhaps coming to terms with what's happened since he upped sticks and left as a young adult. In conversation with Tim Blanks (p.54) he recounts the ensuing years: uncertainty, frustration, loneliness, self-destruction, graft, conviction, acceptance, wealth, influence, and 'more success than, as a 19-year-old art student, I could ever have imagined.' For Rick, who recently turned 60, it's been not so much a 'journey' as a topsy-turvy rollercoaster ride. And it remains freewheeling and self-defining each year, each season, and through each collection he designs. Long may it continue.

Elsewhere in this issue (p.300), fellow American designer Daniel Roseberry opens up about his own coming-of-age tale, and its influence on the dramatic surrealism he's bringing back to the house of Schiaparelli. It's a story of Christian guilt, the shame of sexuality, and sense of destiny that a career in fashion design could offer a pathway to self-acceptance.

In Beijing, young designer Dingyun Zhang also tells of coming-of-age (p.340). Of how he'd sit in his bedroom fashioning sneakers made from paper and cardboard that he dreamed would be worn by Kobe Bryant. Since then, as well as the colossal puffer jackets that have quickly made his name, Ding has designed real sneakers. For Yeezy, no less. At the personal request of (Kan)ye. His is ultimately a story of how fashion can transform hope into opportunity.

But far beyond the safe confines of fashion, our thoughts turn to Ukraine, and those for whom hope and comfort have never felt so acutely distant. Olya Kuryshchuk, founder of 1 Granary, and Venya Brykalin, fashion director of *Vogue* Ukraine, each write passionately and with humility about how they're coming to terms with the realities and uncertainties of experiencing their nation at war (p.136 and 138). Rather than dismissing fashion as flighty or frivolous, it's become a focal point for both of them, a catalyst for action, activation or simply acceptance, at a time so preoccupied by fear. 'To have something I love so much is the world,' says Olya. 'Fashion is what allows me to keep going.'



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‘Am I guilty sometimes of romanticizing doom and gloom? Maybe.’

The heart and darkness of Rick Owens.

Interview by Tim Blanks
Photographs by Juergen Teller; creative partner Dovile Drizyte
Styling by Jodie Barnes

CYBEX

Few fashion designers have so successfully created a world as fiercely idiosyncratic as Rick Owens'. Serving up dark, riotous glamour and challenging orthodoxy are his line of business – and he's been doing it majestically for almost 30 years. Today, OWENSCORP, the incongruously corporate-sounding business he and his longtime partner Michèle Lamy have built, generates annual revenue in the hundreds of millions.

Along the way, he's attracted the kind of devoted (read: obsessive) global following more commonly reserved for scaled-up cultish pop stars. To his fans, Owens's domestic arrangements, cultural tastes, and lifestyle choices (psychedelics, enthusiastic clubbing, committed body transformation) offer a kind of portal into an all-encompassing world. Buying his clothes, it seems, is the entry-level ticket to exploring it.

Now aged 60, Rick Owens shows no signs of slowing down. *Au contraire*. His recent shows and collections – both during and since the pandemic – have arguably been his most masterful, most emotionally charged, and, at times, most conventionally (and deliberately) beautiful.

With all this swirling in our minds, *System* was keen to have a closer look inside the Rick Owens story, and take stock of the sometimes turbulent rise, enduring aesthetic, and endearing honesty that are part of his otherwise guru-like presence. Who better than confessional conversationalist Tim Blanks to spend the day in Paris in Rick's intoxicating company? They discussed life and death, friendships and family, kinks and conquests, mothers and muses.

The following day, Owens jetted out to the Concordia base of OWENSCORP to be photographed by Juergen Teller, before Teller and stylist Jodie Barnes captured an ensemble cast of Owensian beauties who showcase the designer's recent-era collection archives.

Finally, we invited a dozen of Owens's most fervent followers to swap stories and ask him their questions. 'Rick's like a chameleon in pursuit of beauty,' says superfan Matt Campo. 'He imbues his clothes with undeniable ego and brashness, but also genuine sincerity and warmth.' Reflecting on his own trajectory and success, Rick is humble, grateful, godlike: 'I sent out a message and people responded. That is the best you can ask for in life.'

Rick Owens is worried we will have nothing to talk about. 'My story is pretty simple and straightforward. It is not overly complex and I have tried to be direct about it, and I don't overanalyse things, so everything I say will be a repeat of something I have already said to you.' It's not true, of course. Aside from the fact that droll self-deprecation is something of a default position for Owens, it's a simple truth that the man's life and work are no open book, whatever he says. They unfold like a lotus, sometimes mystifying, always fascinating. He wonders what *he* would want to read about himself, then, in a flash, answers his own question: 'I would want to read *gossip*.' And Rick has given fashion tattletales something to twitter about over the past couple of years.

He and his partner of more than three decades, the formidable Michèle Lamy, have built their business OWENSCORP on one of the industry's most defiantly uncompromising aesthetics, a thrilling combination of eldritch glamour and barbaric futurism. They've taken it to the bank and back to the tune of cash registers ringing up hundreds of millions of dollars in sales of clothing, accessories, and the Lamy-supervised collection of brutalist furniture that extends the Owens ethos into the world of interiors. The couple have led a charmed life, uniquely bonded in their challenge to orthodox thought and deed. But there are other challenges greater by far. Take the pandemic, for instance, and the way it has unhinged social stability and, to a depressing degree, simple human reason. Then there's time, brutal and unforgiving in its passage. As Owens approached the milestone of 60, he found a young male muse, whose Viking visage will be familiar to anyone who saw the designer's presentations during lockdown. In his perfect physical embodiment of the Owens ethos, he opened a Pandora's box for Rick of what once was, what might have been, and what now seemed possible all over again. A defiant antidote to *tempus fugit*, in other words. Even for someone whose sensibility comfortably embraces antiquity and the future in equal degree, that possibility was still a profound shock to the system.

It has taken a difficult while, but Owens insists he has managed to process the inner turmoil, balance his emotional allegiances, maybe even reconcile his past, present and future. In March, he returned to live shows in Paris with what was, quite possibly, the show of his career. Of course, that's a hard call with a designer who has regularly provoked and stunned over the years. For all the step dancers, death-metal acrobats, penises in full effect, and pyres of raging flame so flagrant in those past presentations, there was something even more powerful about the discreet grace of Owens's models parading through a Venetian-like fog in their goddess dresses to the strains of Mahler's Fifth Symphony in the same week that Tsar Vladimir invaded Ukraine. The worship of beauty felt like an act of defiance in the face of fascist ugliness. Ultimately futile, maybe, but breathtakingly poignant in the moment.

What crucible shaped such visions? I'll never stop wondering, and we'll never *not* have plenty to talk about. The Owens geography alone: birthed in Porterville, California, transmogrified on Hollywood Boulevard, transplanted to Paris, working in Concordia sulla Secchia in the Emilia-Romagna, living on the Lido in Venice… but let's start with the truly wild card. Egypt!

Rick Owens: A while ago, Paris and Italy were a little uncomfortable for me personally. I felt like I was running from one to the other. But when Michèle and I went to Egypt, there was something about going so far out of my personal zone that just put everything back into perspective, and I got all my comfort back. I've been twice in the last year. It is just the legend of it I love. I was talking to one of my team members who went to Egypt last month and was so disturbed by the contrast between the haves and the have-nots that he didn't enjoy it. My perspective was that there is discomfort all over the world, and Egypt to me is more about proportion and space. There is so much. I go to this very old and shabby hotel and there is this emptiness. The Valley of the Gods and these massive monuments that are *soooooo* ancient, and then desert and scrubland, and a pool. There was something about the simplicity of all that was working for me. It was what I needed right then. And probably it was about mortality, too. I mean, these are monuments built for people who are dead, and this is how they wanted to be remembered. And deciding to be remembered is quite interesting. People talk about legacy a lot, and I guess that is what I am doing. I'm thinking about what impression I want to leave. I turned 60 in November.

'People talk about legacy, and I guess that is what I am doing. I'm thinking about what impression I want to leave. I turned 60 in November.'

And there is nothing I love more than reading biographies of weird eccentrics from the past. Michèle is always telling me that I only love dead artists and I'm like, 'Yeah, because I want to see how it all worked out! I want to see if they were able to sustain the momentum and maintain their conditions to the very end.' I don't want to invest in someone who is going to change or turn into a different person.

Tim Blanks: Didn't you say once that you are always fundamentally who you are? There is no escape.
Yeah, I mean that is why I commit to things. It's as simple as what I wear. I have a uniform that I wear all the time and I have decided who I want to be. Here, let me show you the *Vogue* video we did.

We pause to watch Rick's edition of Vogue*'s 'Objects of Affection', for which he took viewers on a video tour of his apartment in Concordia sulla Secchia, near Modena. It's a two-hour drive south-west of the Lido in Venice, where he has another apartment, the location for his digital presentations during the industry's Covid shutdown. In Concordia, he lives across the street from his factory in an apartment as stark as you might expect. The space is partially carpeted and upholstered with army blankets, as all his apartments have been since he lived on Hollywood Boulevard in the 1980s. ('Inspired by Joseph Beuys, who was my first art hero when I went to art school.') As he says in the video, he is not very acquisitive and doesn't like living with a lot of things. Rick is particularly proud, however, of his Egyptian sarcophagus. He waited for a long time for the right one. He calls her Liza, after Liza Minnelli. Rick would have made a wonderful reclusive rock star, à la Mick Jagger in* Performance.

You are very, very serious in that video. I don't think of you as being so serious.
Do you think it comes across that way? If you know me, then I guess it is a bit deadpan. But anyway, when they suggested it to me, this is what I'd wanted to get, something sedate and calm, not too pop and too lively, kind of a non-flashy alternative designer kind of thing. And it came out great.

Those kids who follow you on Discord are going to go crazy. This will be like Moses coming down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments.
There is a lot there that's ripe for parody, like when I say I have 20 pairs of shorts.

When Jonathan [Wingfield, *System*'s editor] and I were thinking about this conversation at the beginning, we came up with 'A Tale of Three Cities: Hollywood, Paris and Venice'. But I'm more inclined to two, Hollywood and Venice, because everything that you made yourself into in Hollywood is consummated by you living in that Visconti environment in Venice.
It is, it is. The full arc.

What does Venice mean? It does feel like an arc completed. How old were you when you first saw *Death in Venice*?[1]
I must have been in my 20s. I'm sure it was at the Vista Theatre, a big decrepit barn of a building, with Egyptian gold motifs.[2] I went with my roommate Linda. We were both goths living in a goth house. She went on to be a nursery-school teacher in Seattle. So we go with her bag full of wine and get shit-faced during the movie, and that was the first time I saw *Death in Venice*.

Does that come back to you when you're in your apartment on the Lido? Living right next door to the Grand Hôtel des Bains.[3]
That is why I moved there. I never read the book, but my first attraction to the Lido was that movie, that era. The exoticism of Venice, how it really is one of the most glamorous places in the particular world that I'm interested in.

How relevant do you think growing up in Porterville is to the fact that you now live in Venice?[4]
I was propelled, wasn't I? I mean, if I had had a perfectly well-adjusted sedate childhood, where would I be now? You need something to push you.

Where *would* you be now?
I'd be something my dad would have wanted me to be.

Have you seen *The Most Beautiful Boy in the World*?[5]
Yes. It is irresistible to compose something with youth and beauty and threat and decline. It's always been one of the most compelling stories. Glorious beauty, threatened. Of course there is sadness because there is decline at the end. But that is how the world works; there is always going to be a sad ending.

'My dad would oil and polish all his guns and then leave them out on the dining-room table, with all the oily mess everywhere. Like a gutted animal.'

The Most Beautiful Boy in the World *documents the blighted life of Björn Andrésen, subsequent to his appearance as Tadzio, the golden youth in Visconti's* Death in Venice. *Owens drolly acknowledges that the film adds an irresistibly emblematic edge to his own male-muse situation, but, as he so accurately notes, that story is hardly his story. And, after all, doom – manifested in the gorgeous dying fall of transient beauty – has been a regular Owens go-to over the years. As this issue of* System *appears, he is presenting his latest men's collection, in which a blazing globe representing the sun is raised high by a forklift, before crashing to the ground.*

Is the collapsing sun your comment on the climate crisis?
It's just doom, and frustration with world issues. The sun, goodness over evil, crashing to the ground, destroyed…

Evil triumphs?
Well, the repetition implies that it doesn't triumph, it's just repeating.

You say 'doom' with such a dry chuckle, but I know you mean it.
I console myself with the fact that the good has somehow always managed to triumph over evil. That is always my message. Am I guilty sometimes of romanticizing gloom and doom? Maybe. But glamorizing it is also a way of processing it because it's something that is omnipresent. There was another article where I had this sarcophagus and this skull, and the writer was like, 'How can you live with those vibes?', and I am like, 'How can you *not* live with those vibes?' Life is about death and threat, and civilizations have got all sorts of ways of dealing with it. Why are there are crosses all over everyone's houses? It's to remind us all that Christ suffered more than anyone ever will, and in times of stress and pain, you are being reminded that someone suffered longer or more intensely than you. Suffering is something that you have to get used to, and that is why there are all those depictions of a dying man on a cross. I mean, besides the morality and the spirituality of it, it serves a very practical purpose: to get us not to be afraid of suffering – or at least not be surprised by it.

We talk about Rick's background. An only child, he was raised in a staunchly Catholic environment. His father, John, died in 2015; his mother Connie, now 88, has had serious health issues. He is moving her from Porterville to Concordia. I think that's incredibly brave on everyone's part.

If you're moving your mom to Concordia, you're planning on being there a lot?
As soon as we were able to travel after Covid, I thought of Concordia as the basis of all our survival. We all need Concordia to work for all of us, so I kind of hunkered down there, because there was a bit of restabilizing to do. I always said Italy is where I go to create and Paris is where I go to be judged. Paris is not the most welcoming place, but in Concordia I have a whole army – maybe 200 people – working, so it ends up being a cosier place.

When you have that many people depending on you, do you feel like the shaman of the tribe?
More like the village idiot. I feel like we are all lucky, I'm basically the goose that lays the golden egg, and we all have to figure out what to do with it.

It seems really gutsy of your mom to move.
I have a really nice house for her near the factory, with nice high ceilings and a huge garden. Mom is scared of leaving the house she is so attached to in Porterville. It was her sanctuary, the house I built for her across town so she could escape from Dad at a point when he was getting very dark as he got older. He was bitter and angry, and he wasn't speaking to me for years before he died. She had that house for three years, and every day she would go furniture shopping and buy stuff for it. He thought she was out with friends, so he never knew. She could decorate it how she wanted it without him leaving all his stuff all over the place. He would oil and polish all his guns and then leave them out on the dining-room table, with all the oily mess everywhere. Like a gutted animal. It was a sort of display in a way, like a puzzle for him, and a symbol of manhood and of accomplishment.

Did he use them?
We would go out target practising. Recently I've been to the target-practice place in Venice; it's like a concrete bunker and it's where they train the police force, and these guys were like, 'You should join the police force; you are good'. Apparently I am good

'I always thought I looked soft and vulnerable. A little Liza Minnelli-ish. Big, cow-like eyes. An innocent gerbil in the big city, trying to look tough.'

enough for the Lido police force. So anyway, I understand Mom's connection with that house. She is afraid, she is like, 'You are not going to put me into a hospital are you?' I'm like, 'I swear I will never do that.' But all her friends are dying, and I have to pull her out of there. I told her this isn't a definitive plan: 'You have your house there, you have your house in Concordia, you have your family in Mexico, you can circulate. You can do anything you want, and you know I am getting you a ticket with a return flight, so you don't feel trapped in Italy.' But it is time to come and see how it feels. She has no choice.

Is it literally that bad in Porterville?
All her friends are dying. She was a teacher's aide for migrant farm workers. She would interpret for them, so she has a following of all these kids who grew up with her as their maternal figure. They visit with their grandkids and they are very attentive, but they're not *her* family. I'm the only one, and I can't be over there that much.

Were you going more often?
I went for the first time recently in like 20 years, when she started struggling. I have always resisted because I thought I didn't want to return to a place where I had been weak or struggling or frustrated. I mean, why would I want to remember that? But it was great. I totally underestimated how great it feels to go back at full power. It felt very reassuring and comforting, and very familiar. I was like, why am I in such a good mood here? I was never happy here; this was where I was frustrated and threatened. Why am I happy here now? I am still not sure.

So it wasn't like Ingrid Bergman and *The Visit*?[6] You remember that film? She returned to the town where she was raised, where Anthony Quinn's character had raped her when she was young. She had left town under a cloud, gone off and married the richest man in the world. She inherits his wealth, and then comes back to town, where Quinn is now the mayor, and sets about destroying him by slowly corrupting the whole place and turning everyone against him.
Why didn't I do that?

I thought that is what you were going to say.
I can't wait to see this movie!

So you went back and felt comfortable there?
I felt great comfort and serenity there, hanging out with mom in her garden. Yeah, it was lovely.

Did you ever resolve things with your dad?
There was nothing to resolve really. It was a war that we had together. My dad was such a big lesson because we had always been very frank about everything, like hard-ass blunt. So I didn't think anything was off the table with him. I had described our relationship as tense because he was very right-wing. In one article I described him as an adorable Nazi, and he was fine with that; he did have a sense of humour. He thought that was funny. But then in another article, I said I had a hard time with what I perceived as his bigotry, and that he couldn't forgive. Because I would not debate with him, and he wanted to have a debate to prove empirically that he was not bigoted. I was, like, this is just my interpretation. I mean, who am I? But I had a louder megaphone than he did; I had been able to say that in front of everyone, and he couldn't retaliate with a bigger microphone. That was what broke us. It wasn't the fact we disagreed; it was the fact that I was louder.

Surely everything about you – the way you were living, the way you transformed yourself – he would have seen as a total rejection of what he was.
It was, and I have to hand it to him, he was a good sport. He showed up to the shows and he sat next to the drag queens, and he shook hands with the homosexuals, which was amazing. I mean, he bit his lip, but he showed up. So that is impressive.

And he was proud?
Yeah, he wasn't gushy, but he definitely said, 'It is amazing what you have done.' I mean, he hated it, but he was definitely impressed. But anyway that was the last thing where my voice was louder. That was a lesson because – and this has happened with Michèle, too – sometimes I've said something that, out of context, didn't sound comfortable to her, and while it never became a huge problem, I've learned that anything I say in this context is going to change and be amplified once it is printed – and I can't do that to people I love any more, even though I am dying to talk about them all the time. I would love to, but it is just like a power that is too unwieldly in a way.

'I stopped drinking because my alcoholism was so bad. They had to give me downers so that I wouldn't hyperventilate because I had the shakes so bad.'

After a conversation Rick and I had in March, I was painfully conscious of that amplification. He was trying to clarify his feelings about the presence in his life of someone who was much younger, carefree, vibrant. It was almost as though he was thinking aloud, thinking through a difficult situation.

I was also getting so vulnerable. I have gotten to the other side of it now. When I spoke to you then, there was a lot of desperation, but I have found myself again and found my specialness and my powers.

Thank God for that. You were doubting yourself and I was like, please, no! I never doubted what I do; I was just destabilized. There is like this regret when you see this shining example of vitality and you see your reflection in that. It's kind of, wow, I don't think I ever was that. There is no way I am ever going to be that in my entire life – and that is a kind of death. There is a mourning and a shock. You know, this is my drama, this doesn't happen to every single 60-year-old man. It was circumstantial I think.

It's really hard for me to even conceptualize what sort of vitality you imagine you could have never had. That's why I'm fascinated by your early life in LA. We've never really talked about it. I remember telling you how much I loved the Screamers, and you made a throwaway comment about [the band's co-founder] Tommy Gear and I didn't know if that was for real or not.[7]
That I fucked Tommy Gear?

Well, that you were *with* him [pause for TB's attack of the vapours]. I fell in love with the Screamers in 1978 and that seems a little… *early* for this story.
I graduated in 1979 and my wild years in LA were through to 1985 and then I was with Michèle.

So tell me about those wild years.
I graduated in 1979 from high school in Porterville, then I worked as a pharmacy delivery boy for a while. They had a truck, and I would deliver pills until… they had a prescription for diet pills that nobody picked up for a long time and I think that was probably a trap for delivery boys. So I took them and then I got fired, but they never said that was why. So I am never really sure if that was it.

Were those the Quaalude years?
No, it was always speed. We never had good Quaaludes in Porterville.[8] I was mainly drinking, and I think mom could see that I was just going down the drain. I think my school counsellor suggested Otis [College of Art and Design], so mom organized a trip to go see it with me.[9] She helped me get an apartment and she kind of set me up there. I think her friend had a daughter who was living in Los Angeles.

What did you look like at that point?
I always thought I looked really soft and vulnerable. I was always a bit embarrassed. I looked a little Liza Minnelliish… big, open cow-like eyes, innocent. Like an innocent gerbil in the big city, trying to look tough.

And your hair?
There were so many variations. I mean, after I met [extreme performance artist] Ron Athey, I started doing the spikes like Ron.[10] I had spikes in the front and at the back.

As an innocent gerbil in the big city, how on earth did you meet Ron Athey?
I got a job as an extras scout, so I was supposed to go out and put together a punk club scene. I saw Ron Athey on the street and I got his number and asked if he wanted a job. He needed a ride, so I ended up driving him to the set. He didn't have all the tattoos yet. He had a very soft face, too, but he had these eyes that were really evil and then a teardrop *here* [Rick indicates the corner of his eye], and these hair spikes. He was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen in my life. Anyway, I totally pursued him, though he never really responded. I was going out with Michael, this guy from a band – I forget its name – and he lived with his lover, Spider, who worked at Basic Plumbing, a sex club on La Brea Avenue. They had been together for a long time, so it was fine for me to be Michael's boyfriend, and we all went to a party in downtown LA on the tracks. Ron Athey was there, and I snuck off with Ron and we had sex on the railroad tracks. I actually already told this story to this cute little punk rock magazine called *Insurrection*.

I think the Screamers were in a punk movie. *Population: 1*. Was it that?

'Art was too hard. I didn't understand it enough. It was too cerebral and intimidating for me, and I just thought I can't be an artist, I don't get all that.'

It wasn't even a punk movie; it was a John Candy movie that never even came out. It was a comedy, and he blunders into a punk club at one point. It was really stupid. So anyway, I've been in contact with Ron over the years. Michèle and I would go to his performances years after I met him. He was my age, so we would have been 30 by then, and he had become *the* performance artist, and we would go see him at Club Fuck! in Silverlake, the thing where he would cut himself, then put the paper towels across his back and string them across the audience.[11] He was spectacular.

I'm grasping at chronology here. You moved to LA in 1980?
It was a year after I graduated from high school. I was still drinking in Porterville and my mom pushed me to LA. And I went to Otis, the art school. For the two years I was there, I didn't really explore that much. I was very devoted to art school and that area, downtown LA. I didn't even go to that many punk clubs.

Did you go to the Veil?
I might have. Someone said they saw me once, but I don't think so. I went to Power Tools. It was kind of after goth. There was Plastic Passion. There was the Bitter End. Paul Fortune had something… wait, *he* was the one running the Veil. And in his book he said he remembers a young Rick Owens hanging out by the back door or something. I don't think I was there. [Laughs] For the two years of college where I didn't really circulate that much, I had a very small circle of friends. I was kind of quiet, doing art-school stuff, very much in that area, downtown LA, but not the downtown that is fabulous, just art-student-poor-people downtown. I mean, I must have had drive and ambition, but I think the lazy side of me was drinking too much out of frustration and bitterness. My drinking was always very dark.

What would you drink?
Vodka. Get me there fast; I didn't have time for beer.

Even at Otis, you were plagued by bitter drinking?
No, everything there was new; there was probably potential because I was going to school. I was creating stuff; I was going somewhere; I was moving forward. So I wasn't as self-loathing or frustrated that I couldn't break through. Then I stopped going, because I just couldn't afford it any more. I took out student loans and then I got scared of taking out more, so financially it wasn't working. Then I went to trade school, and there was just nothing for a while.

Were you out at this point?
Oh, yeah.

Were you ever scared for yourself?
Oh, yeah, that is why I stopped drinking because my alcoholism was so bad. They had to give me downers so that I wouldn't hyperventilate because I had the shakes so bad. That was what scared me the most.

Did Michèle try and stop you?
She would call the doctors. We were living above Swingers, this coffee shop that Sean MacPherson[12] was running. He had the Bar Marmont, and all the cool restaurants in Los Angeles. It was a coffee shop that was also a really funny motel. I had my studio, and Michèle was building her restaurant, Café des Artistes[13], across the street on Hollywood Boulevard. We were really broke, and that was when my alcoholism reached a peak. I think Michèle and I got together when I was 27, so I was drinking from 25 to 35.

It didn't all change when you connected with her?
It wasn't a huge life change, but it was definitely an alliance. It was very much a soulful connection, like this is my other half. Or like, that we belonged together.

That whole thing about your drinking blows out of the water my notion about you being always in control.
When I wasn't drinking, I was always very driven and very organized, and I got a lot of stuff done. But then I would have these three-day binges where I would just pass out, wake up and then just pass out again as quickly as I could to sort of escape. It was very self-destructive.

Riven with self-loathing?
I don't think I hated myself, I think there was a sort of gay shame somewhere from my dad, my family and Porterville. Also all that energy and ambition that was not coming to fruition… I think that was what it was. I was shy, so I needed courage to demand the attention or the validation that I craved.

'I loved going to sex clubs every night. It was just being in an extreme, exotic environment, where everybody was going as far as they could go.'

And you thought that drinking brought out the attention?
No, no, it gave me the courage to go out and be somebody. Then when that wasn't fulfilling, it just comforted me. The other thing I have learned is that when you are expressing yourself creatively, the people who do so successfully are successful because they have a higher sensitivity. In the worst of circumstances, that can translate into being a drama queen. I get to be poetic, that is my job, to try and create poetry and to try and make compositions of things that feel emotionally compelling. The bad side to that, though, is that in your personal life, you can be overly romantic and over-idealistic, overly emotional or sensitive. So there is a drama-queen side to it. And that is what happened to me. I wasn't drinking for attention but trying to get attention for the work I was doing. The drinking was to give me the courage to go out and pursue it, that was the attention I wanted. I wanted to be validated. I didn't perform; I wasn't a performer. I stopped because I really thought I was going to die. So it was fear. It wasn't anything noble, just dumb fear.

When you stopped, could you look at where you had been and understand why you had been there?
Yeah, I was frustrated. I thought I was a failure.

And when did you stop?
I did my first runway show in 1994; I stopped drinking maybe a year before. But I was doing clothes for maybe five years before the show. I sold to Charles Gallay,[14] Bendel's, Joyce, Charivari…[15] ostentatious or tacky. They would have office parties and invite people to look at slides of their latest Italian tour. It was a great environment. At the same time, I started going to fashion school to be a pattern-maker. Art was too hard. I didn't understand it enough; it was too cerebral for me. There were these art-theory classes that were so abstract and intimidating and I just thought I can't be an artist, I don't get all that. They scared me out of pursuing being an artist, so I thought: 'Well, I am smart enough to be a designer, so I'll do that.' So I went to design school and then I got a job as a pattern maker in the garment industry downtown. I was doing patterns and kind of fast-fashion patterns and then somebody told me there was a job at Michèle's label. I went there and the rest is history.

So you were doing all that while you were drinking yourself to death.
Yeah, I was getting a lot done. That was who I was. I was a big drinker; Michèle was, too. We drank a lot together, so it made sense. We were a perfect match.

When did your physical transformation begin?
Very soon after we got together. I was an office boy at this architectural administration firm. They were very charming, very bohemian, very sophisticated. They would do these hand-drawn architectural illustrations for potential buildings, like handmade renderings. The owner was the main illustrator, and we were in this really charming sort of Spanish building downtown. It was very *World of Interiors*. These people had a very clear line about what was

Did she interview you for the job?
She did. I had a nose ring, and I wore a long durag in this very beautiful brown silk jersey that I found in a hat-trim place in downtown Los Angeles. I must have worn make-up. I don't know what I was trying to do.

And your hair?
It was always black, and very wavy.

So you must have looked kind of cholo, very masculine.
I think I did, but I was super, super white. For some reason, I had very pale skin. Michèle had all the jewellery and the bracelets. She was more kittenish then, very languorous. We didn't hook up for two years because we didn't do that much in the factory right next to each other. She just passed by. She would sometimes have a party at her house and I would go, or we would run into each other at clubs. Stuff like that for two years because I didn't really know her.

And what was the trigger to connect?
I mean, she was so adorable and cute, and had such great body language and style. We were just drunk one night, and I made a move.

And you had been gay up until then?
Yeah, I mean I had a girlfriend way before, so I wasn't completely innocent, but she was just so cute. She was married, but it was all very casual and bohemian. I don't remember any confrontations. I just remember one night at the club, Michèle and I were there, and I had my arm around her and then

'I had soft nipples, and softness in the thighs and belly. Then I took steroids and worked out with a trainer, and it bulked me up and I got really thick.'

Richard [Newton, Lamy's first husband[16]] showed up, and he had a drink with us, but it was like nothing. Like we knew it was a moment where decisions could be made and things were being revealed and an understanding was being met, but no one really said anything.

One thing I was curious about in LA was the way that AIDS decimated things.
I was going to bring that up. Death was everywhere. Friends of mine were always going to funerals. I wasn't though; I went to, like, two. That period was my sex period, but I loved the sex clubs, that was where we would go every night. That was my clubhouse. And it was just being in an extreme, exotic environment, where everybody was going as far as they could go.

And you were a voyeur?
No, I participated, very gleefully. That sounded a bit boyish.

I once walked past [legendary New York club] Mineshaft and I was kind of sorry I never went in, but it just smelled so bad.
Yes, but that was part of it. You see, I'm a pig, you're not. I had kind of a prissy childhood; my family was a little puritanical but also very prissy about hygiene, so those were forbidden fruits, to be in that environment. By the way, when I was in grade school, I was terrified about having to go to high school and be naked in the showers with other boys. That made me so uncomfortable. Then when it finally happened, obviously I was super uncomfortable and really, well it was just terrible… I mean, it's not like anyone did anything to me, but my sexual tension and that environment with all of these guys, all that masculinity. Like the games when you had to pick the teams? Finally in the end, they would just let me sit down and read. That masculinity was so threatening to me. All that nudity and sexual tension was a nightmare to me. So when I came into my power, I took over that space. I had power suddenly. I could recreate that situation with me winning.

That's why I mentioned Ingrid Bergman going back to that town. You restructured.
Well, a lot of what I put on the runway is vengeful. Showing exposed dicks on the runway, showing dicks indifferently… it was after Dad passed, but having a puritanical father whose machismo was so sacred, for me to do that would have killed him.

Do you think it's that fundamental? That there's this kind of Oedipal challenge through your career, that you're creating with your father on your mind a lot of the time?
Your father is your god when you are young, so everything you do is based around seeking approval from that god or dealing with the rejection. Also, because we were in a small town with no relatives or no cousins, I didn't have a lot of other kids around. I was kind of a lonely child. Our little Catholic family was very insulated.

He also denied you access to all the things your peers had, like television.
Now, looking back on it, that was a great idea and worked out pretty well.

Listening to Wagner didn't compensate for missing *The Munsters* though.
I hated it! I hated having to sit through all that music.

As an only child who was close to his mom, did you gang up on your dad?
We were both afraid of him, not in an abusive way, but he was very dominating. And mom had grown up in a Mexican Catholic family and was very conscious of her position as a wife and mother, and what was expected of her. I guess we did protest together a bit, yeah. I did mention sex clubs to him as a provocation. I never really considered it, but I think the revenge I looked for was over the past. Here was a guy who grew up in a certain time in a certain way. I always thought that mom and I felt really bad for him; we felt that he had problems, like he was emotionally stunted, so we protected him. We knew that all of this came from fear and self-doubt and insecurity and vulnerability. We both felt protective towards him.

What do you see of him in you?
Bigotry, and I see 'judginess'. I also see that I have a set of rules that I think should apply to everybody; I catch myself being narrow sometimes and it is almost like a genetic disease that I am really aware of. I have to be careful not to disapprove. I can also go in the other direction, and not make up my mind, and always play devil's advocate. I have this moral superiority and then I feel that I overcompensate to make up for it.

'For me, having a puritanical father whose machismo was so sacred, to show exposed dicks on the runway while he was alive would have killed him.'

Does that sort itself out with time? Do you feel you are mellowing?
I feel very mellow in relationships. I feel you need to let a person be who they want to be; you need to be happy with what they can give you and not expect more. You can't expect one person to satisfy all of your needs. I have been telling myself these things over the past five years. I think that has evolved. On the other hand, with the clothes I am making and what I am trying to do with the company, I feel more ferocious than ever. And on the other hand, I feel frustrated with this world's moralism.

For years, you shied away from any political connotations in what you do, and now you are embracing them.
Everything is political. I always think of the human condition, for sure. I don't like to address specific things that are happening in the world. I never feel like I have the authority to make great political statements; that is something that my father would do. I don't feel like I studied enough to have that kind of authority. But I do know, and I understand how to protest. I also understand that what I do cannot correct anything. It is only ever a protest, but that can be good.

You've said that you choose politeness over defiance, which I thought was strange, even though you are an incredibly mannerly and gracious person.
There is a lot of defiance in what I do, in a nice way.

What about the last women's collection? Admittedly, the collection was done before Putin invaded Ukraine, but you were able to recontextualize the show by using the Mahler symphony rather than what would have been one of your more typically aggressive soundtracks. At that moment you chose to exalt beauty as a defiant gesture, and it was stunning. Where do you feel you are now?
It was all so sad; there was a definite melancholy to it all.

Melancholy in the light of the context you were showing it in?
I hadn't really thought about that.

There is a rich seam of melancholia in much that Owens makes. The sense of lost worlds is strong. He can convincingly equate Babylon in 2000 BC and Hollywood in 1920 AD. The common thread is scale. The human form is elongated, exaggerated, swathed to create an illusion of almost superhuman glamour. The illusion is often confrontational, monstrous, even, but there is an extreme beauty in the strange. It was less extreme in the last women's collection, where even Owens acknowledged the classical beauty of his bias-cut gowns. An unwitting synchronicity with world events made those dresses a peculiarly appropriate fashion response to the bottomless ugliness Vladimir Putin was unleashing to the East.

Old Hollywood was a frame of reference for you. How? When? Why?
In my dad's basement library. I remember it always having a sense of dissipation that corresponded to Hollywood Boulevard. Maybe the fact that it was buried under the house. It was always shadowy. Those books didn't belong on the real bookshelves in the house; they were in the basement. It's not like they were dirty books. I mean, we had the Marquis de Sade upstairs; I was free to read that.

The sense of Old Hollywood is one of the most poignant things in your work, the way you ravishingly recreate the atmosphere, the shadowy, bias-cut languor, the beauty of those dresses.
Black-and-white movies in the basement. It was the imagery and the environments, too. Theda Bara's boudoir![17] That kind of life, that kind of scale. All those Cecil B. DeMille movies, the scale was so huge. Living in these monumental sets, the dresses dragging on the floor… Oh, is that dress going to get dirty? People weren't asking that back then. It was beyond that.

The whole thing about fashion in LA is that it did exist in a hothouse. It was the most influential fashion in the world in a way, in that people saw it in the movies.
It really was the Hollywood thing – that was the only reference that there was in LA. Nothing contemporary. I had the most beautiful apartment, a block above Hollywood Boulevard, part of the top floor of a house, a bedroom, a living room and a little kitchen. And I had a black T-Top Camaro with a V8 engine.[18] I had such a tight little driveway that I don't know how I got in and out after a long night. Not always successfully, because the car ended up getting kind of scratched

'I went back to Porterville for the first time recently in 20 years. It felt very reassuring. I was like, why am I in such a good mood here? I am still not sure.'

up. I remember looking at Southern Crescent Heights and dreaming of living there, because the buildings just looked like something out of Armistead Maupin[19], with an eccentric landlady and someone playing piano in one of the apartments and the fountain tinkling in the courtyard. It just seemed magical. And I was like: 'Wow, I'm going to live here some day.' And *now*… [a single Owens eyebrow flexes at the wonder of it all].

You'd never go back.
Oh God, no! I could see myself living there, but only on an estate with peacocks and maybe a tiger or two. Then it could be great.

What is your favourite representation of Old Hollywood?
My main one is *Cleopatra*, the Cecil B. DeMille movie with Claudette Colbert, the most improbable Cleopatra ever;[20] you couldn't have picked a worse one. The entire thing is entirely ridiculous.

Theda Bara's real name was Theodosia Goodman. Claudette Colbert's was Lily Chauchoin. Nothing and no one was real in Old Hollywood. It was all self-invention. One of the first conversations we ever had, you listed everything you'd done to yourself, like you were trying to coach me to believe that everything I was looking at was entirely artificial.
Not entirely artificial, but definitely 'manipulated'.

Self-invention.
Yes, self-invention. The funny thing is, I can't do fillers. I tried Botox and I couldn't tell the difference. I can't go there, but I did steroids for a time and that really helped. It got everything in place.

What's 'everything'?
Before the steroids, I had softness. I had soft nipples; I had kind of little girl's boobs, and softness in the thighs and belly. When I took the steroids and worked out with a trainer regularly, it bulked me up and I got really thick. I have pictures of me that are kind of shocking. Then when I stopped the steroids and dropped all the weight, all of a sudden this framework of muscles and the nipples got harder. It kind of created a scaffolding inside of me. It was probably 30 years ago when my body transformed.

And that was something you did for yourself?
Michèle got me started. She was going to the trainer, and she was like, 'You should go; you drink too much. It'll be good for your hangovers.' So I did and then it just kind of stuck. And then when I saw things changing, it was just addictive. Also, it just felt like being the best that I could be, like doing everything I possibly could. Probably at that time it was also a satisfying sort of control. More than the results of my career maybe. It's not like things were going badly, but it was just insecure. You don't know if the whole fashion business thing is going to work out. So controlling my body was one way of feeling in control.

A few months before he died, Thierry Mugler told me that his body was the thing that he was proudest of – from ballet dancer to that massive man mountain!
He was so handsome. There is a Rudolf Nureyev biography on Netflix that I have been watching it with the sound off. It's just so beautiful, the old imagery of him dancing and leaping.

So sad.
Why? I look at his life and I think it was a triumph. It was just glorious. Of course, there is the decline at the end. There always is; there has to be.

Do you see that for you?
I do admit the reason that I am reading biographies is to see how they negotiate and live their entire lives. Yeah, because I am 60, things are changing. I am thinking about the next chapters. I am really conscious of how people did things.

When you read these biographies that have a beginning, middle and an end, has anything ever stood out for you about how you would like your life to be? Will it end with people loving you for posterity?
I feel like that is going to happen; I'm not worried about that. I have people who care for me, and I feel that unless I do something incredibly stupid, I will leave a body of work that has a sense of purpose and honour. Yes, I feel good about it. Though it was kind of shocking to me that I could be so emotionally vulnerable. Maybe I am reading these biographies to reassure myself that people can be a little bit messy, to reassure myself that I am not doing it all wrong.

'I could see myself living back in Hollywood, but only if it was on an estate, with peacocks and maybe a tiger or two. Then it could be great.'

How is your balance of Apollo and Dionysus sitting after the past few years?
Oh, Apollo, definitely! I tried Dionysus and it wasn't for me. It has to be Apollo.

Do you actually like the fact that life is still capable of surprising you, just when you thought everything was set?
I think a couple of things have happened. In the beginning, I maybe went overboard but this last collection is more stabilizing. Like all my influences, I have balanced them out better and probably filtered them better. Maybe analysing relationships in general fed into that, just living in my emotions more than I used to.

I felt like in that last collection there was so much less ambiguity than there is usually, like you wanted it to just be beauty at its most breathtaking, rather than challenging.
Yeah, I don't know where that came from actually. I know what you are saying about challenging beauty; I do react against the standards of beauty. The laws are so rigid, every advertisement, every Instagram post – there is just such a narrow set of parameters of beauty. I always try to push that a bit because I resent being told what to do. And also because I think there are other people out there who are feeling left out of that whole world, and they want something different. So that is what I am always trying to explore. And it is tricky. I can't go too far because then it is impossible for anyone to relate to it. But this one did get pretty close to classical beauty. Though I always want everyone to be covered. I want the freaks to be covered, too.

You do have a following that is a little more intense than the average. How do you feel about that?
It means it's working; it means that what I put out there has a reason for polluting the world with our dyes and our extra fabrics. We have an excuse; we have a reason to be here. I see the kids in it, and I am like, 'Wow, they wear this stuff so beautifully.'

Could you ever have conceived of success like this?
No, I don't think so. Though I'm not really sure. There is something in me that remembers I would be frustrated about having to balance my check book, and there was nothing really to suggest otherwise. I just somehow knew I would never have to do that. Like, OK, I will do that now, but I will never have to do that in the future.

So you believe in manifest destiny?
Could be. Maybe I was just a spoiled and pretentious kid from Porterville.

Are you happy now?
Yes, I am. I got myself together. I figured shit out and I'm not such a pussy with the whole relationship thing any more.

1. First published in 1913, Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* tells the story of celebrated author, Gustav von Aschenbach, and his growing – and ultimately tragic – obsession with a beautiful 14-year-old Polish boy, Tadzio, based partly on a child Mann saw in 1911. The book's themes of male aging, youthful beauty and regret were magnified in Luchino Visconti's 1971 adaptation of the book, which starred Dirk Bogarde (as a composer, not a writer) and a young Björn Andrésen. The film famously opens and closes with the Adagietto from Gustav Mahler's Fifth Symphony.

2. The Vista Theatre at 4473 Sunset Drive in Los Angeles opened in 1923 with an architecturally curious Spanish colonial-style exterior and Egyptian-style interior. Since then it has hosted vaudeville acts, shown first-run and classic films, and pornography, both gay and straight. In late 2020, director Quentin Tarantino announced that he had bought the cinema.

3. The imposing and luxurious Grand Hôtel des Bains on the Lido in Venice opened at 7pm on 5 July 1900 and closed 16 years later after a fire. Its 172 rooms and 19 suites were reopened in 1919, welcoming guests ranging from Adolf Hitler to Elizabeth Taylor, until it closed again in 1966 after serious storm damage. A second reopening took place in time for Visconti to film *Death in Venice* in the hotel in 1970. The hotel was again shuttered in 2010, as developers planned to convert it into luxury apartments. That work barely started and today, the hotel remains boarded up and poignantly empty.

4. Lying 260 kilometres north of Los Angeles in the San Joaquin Valley, Porterville (population: 60,000) is, according to its website, 'full of history and small town charm […] and home to a large man-made body of water, Lake Success'. As well as Owens, other Portervilleans include Charlotte Pendragon, the first woman to win Magician of the Year, and Vernon Grant, the artist who created the Snap!, Crackle! and Pop! characters on every box of Kellogg's Rice Krispies.

5. In Kristina Lindström and Kristian Petri's documentary *The Most Beautiful Boy in the World* (2021), Björn Andrésen has a succinct description of his life after starring in *Death in Venice*: 'It was a living nightmare.'
6. Based upon a hit Broadway play by German writer Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Visit* was optioned by 20th Century Fox in February 1960. Ingrid Bergman and Anthony Quinn were cast, celebrated playwright Clifford Odetts hired to write a screenplay, and J. Lee Thompson chosen to direct. The entire project was then cancelled in March 1962 after budget cuts at Fox. The film was finally made, directed by Bernhard Wicki, and released in 1964.

7. Pioneering Los Angeles-electro-punk group the Screamers, founded by Tomata du Plenty and Tommy Gear, was active from 1975 to 1981. According to Pitchfork, its song catalogue mainly 'deals with sex and sexuality'. One of the band's numbers 'Anything', showcases the band's obsessions: 'I get so sick of the fashion and the fascism / Makes me crazy, wanna try a little smash-ism! / You wanna have fun, you want a reaction / I wanna have you, I want a sex action.'

8. Quaalude was a tradename for methaqualone, a drug first synthesized in India in 1951 and used to treat insomnia and anxiety. The pills became such a popular recreational drug in the late 1970s in the US that, according to the BBC, they were nicknamed 'disco biscuits'. The drug was made illegal in many countries in the early 1980s, although it is widely used as a street drug in South Africa.

9. Established in 1918 as the Otis Art Institute and Los Angeles first professional school of the arts, the Otis College of Art and Design today has

1,200 students. Norman Rockwell was the school's artist in residence for much of the 1940s.

10. Self-taught artist Ron Athey, who 'has been working at the vanguard of performance art for 25 years', was an enthusiastic member of the 1980s underground punk scene in Los Angeles, and built an artistic reputation for performances that dealt with subjects including AIDS, body modification, and religious rituals. One of his more notorious works is *Solar Anus* (1999), which Hyperallergic describes as a 're-interpretation of Georges Bataille's 1931 surrealist text in which Athey inserts a stiletto-heel dildo into his anus and dons a golden crown held in place with facial piercings'.

11. 'FUCK! puts it in your face,' wrote Craig Lee in an April 1991 article for *LA Weekly*. 'It's a club celebrating post-AIDS sexuality as body manipulation, set against a non-stop electro-techno danse/trance drone, a mutant version of post-punk S&M.' Held weekly at Basgo's Disco in Silver Lake, Los Angeles, from 1989 to 1992, Club Fuck! was, according to Ron Athey, a place of 'piercing and cutting rituals' and 'a voyeurism/exhibitionism exchange'. For Cliff Diller, one of the night's founders, it was also a place of resistance. 'The way this country is going conservative, you've got to find a way to fight back,' he told Lee. 'So that's why I'll do something like have someone apply 250 clothespins to my body at the club. It releases the endorphins, but it's also a political act.'

12. One Wednesday in August 1993, legendary *Los Angeles Times* restaurant critic Jonathan Gold visited Swingers, four months after restaurateurs Jon Sidel and Sean MacPherson had opened it in the old Beverly Laurel Motor Hotel. After noting that half the male clientele had 'goatees, tribal tattoos, groovy pirate earrings', he declared: 'there is no cooler place in town to scarf a veggie sub, a bowl of gazpacho, a banana-orange smoothie that has been transformed, with amino acids, into something called a thermite bomb.'

13. Café des Artistes was Michèle Lamy's first restaurant venture – 'a romantic, verdant bistro with a … monied boho clientele', according to *Los Angeles* – and the location of the shows for her fashion label. In 1996, she opened Les Deux Cafés, which the magazine described as the 'world's most successful boîte situated in a parking lot' until it closed after, in Lamy's words, 'the front part of the building collapsed, and everything stop'. It reopened in 1997 and finally closed in 2003. 'The service was abysmal (infamously, and intentionally so),' wrote ex-employee and journalist Chris Wallace in *The Paris Review* in 2012, 'the food was *okay*, but the *scene* … the scene was the thing.'

14. The 'Fred and Ginger of the retail business,' according to a 1988 *Los Angeles Times* article, Charles Gallay and his wife Madeleine ran Charles Gallay, their 'chic and sophisticated' Beverly Hills clothing store from 1971 until 1985. After their divorce, Madeleine had some plastic surgery, lost 10 kilos ('I was a heifer,' she told the *Times*), and in 1988 opened her own eponymous clothing store directly opposite Charles' solo venture. She stocked Galliano and Rifat Ozbek; he sold Alaïa and Romeo Gigli. Both stores are now closed.

15. Luxury department store Henri Bendel opened in 1895 in New York and finally shut its doors 123 years later in January 2019, because its then-owner L Brands wanted 'to improve company profitability and focus on our larger brands'. Charivari opened its first store in April 1967 and for much of the 1970s and 1980s was considered New York's most cutting-edge fashion destination. It introduced many European and Japanese designers to the US, including Yohji Yamamoto and Martin Margiela. Charivari later expanded to six stores across Manhattan, but filed for bankruptcy in 1998.

16. Michèle Lamy's first husband Richard Newton, a visual artist and filmmaker, began working with trash in the early 1970s, 'dumpster diving and recycling … to create environmental works of art'. The couple met in 1979, had a daughter (visual artist Scarlett Rouge), and during the 1980s, built a fashion label – Lamy designing and Newton running the business – which, according to a profile of the couple in the *Los Angeles Times*, was worth $10 million by 1990. 'Maybe it's just our temperaments,' Newton told the newspaper, 'but Michèle and I are good for each other.'

17. Born Theodosia Burr Goodman in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1885, Theda Bara was a silent-movie star whose nearly 40 films have been almost entirely lost. Discovered by producer William Fox and promoted as the daughter of a mysterious Eastern nabob – her stage name is an anagram of 'Death Arab' – her popularity peaked with her sensual portrayal of the Egyptian queen in *Cleopatra* (1917). After an unsuccessful Broadway debut and a failed Hollywood comeback, she retired in 1926, and died in 1955.

18. The pony car par excellence, the Chevrolet Camaro was introduced in September 1966 as rival to Ford's Mustang. Originally set to be called Panther, its name was changed to Camaro – a made-up word – shortly before its launch.

19. Armistead Maupin's *Tales from the City* chronicled the lives of Mary Ann Singleton, a naive young woman; Michael 'Mouse' Tolliver, her gay friend; and Anna Madrigal, a transgender woman, who all live in an apartment complex, 28 Barbary Lane, in 1970s San Francisco. First published in 1978, the novel was a hit and spawned five sequels that tracked the characters' lives through various vicissitudes, including parenthood, AIDS and cancer.

20. Cecil B. DeMille's big-budget *Cleopatra*, starring Claudette Colbert, opened in 1934. The *New York Times* found her performance in the big-budget 90-minute extravaganza 'both competent and attractive'.

Omar wears collar, cropped bomber jacket,
jumbo cut-out overshirt, and
Bolan banana pants.
from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022.

Tanya wears Stork jacket,
jumbo V-neck top,
Double Boner elastic shorts,
from *Walrus*, Spring/Summer 2017.

Niki wears hat, one-shoulder T-shirt, graphic tunic, stole, and boxer shorts, from *Sisyphus*, Autumn/Winter 2018.

Tanya wears Zero tunic, Dirt tank top, and Loin skirt, from *Dirt*, Spring/Summer 2018.

Tanya wears Knot Vest jacket
and Glenda gown,
from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022.

Tyrone wears mega-striped jumbo shredded dress,
hooded T-shirt, Babel crown, and Big Mask sunglasses,
from *Babel*, Spring/Summer 2019.

Tanya wears Tec bomber jacket
and Glenda gown,
from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022.

Niki wears Kunst biker jacket,
micro SE Tatlin jacket, bandeau top,
Duke shorts, swimming-trunk shorts,
and thigh-high wader boots,
from *Phlegethon*, Spring/Summer 2021.

Sebastian wears slim Pannier Cargo bodybag,
from *Mastodon*, Autumn/Winter 2016.

Tyrone wears Banana Cargo bodybag,
Puppy duvet jacket, stole and shoes,
from *Glitter*, Fall/Winter 2017.

Niki wears Wreath shell top, Seahorse round-neck dress, and leggings, from *Sphinx*, Autumn/Winter 2015.

Omar wears SL Twisted Seahorse top and slim Flat Cargo bodybag from *Mastodon*, Autumn/Winter 2016.

Edoardo wears Viscontis trousers and Stomper T-shirt, from *Glitter*, Autumn/Winter 2017.

Tanya wears Documenta sunglasses, Ziggy dress, Banana Ziggy tank top, bevelled cuffs, and Bevel Moto Kiss boots, from *Performa*, Autumn/Winter 2020.

Niki wears Bananabag dress, Winter Raven jacket,
Level sock sneakers, and Klobuk hat,
from *Glitter*, Autumn/Winter 2017.

Sebastian wears Knot vest,
from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022.

Tyrone wears Kunst bomber jacket and AL gown,
from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022.

Omar wears Kunst bomber jacket, Dylan T-shirt,
collar, and large Fluoro helmet,
from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022.

Niki wears scarf T-shirt, LS T-shirt, skirt, and Peeled Sleeve trench, from *Babel*, Spring/Summer 2019.

Benas wears Subhuman top and jeans, from *Dirt*, Spring/Summer 2018.

Sebastian wears Garland gown,
from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022.

Omar wears Rod parka,
from *Babel*, Spring/Summer 2019.

Benas wears Kunst Moreau coat and gloves, from *Performa*, Autumn/Winter 2020.

Benas wears SL Emotion top, drawstring Pannier Cargo, and Masto sneakers, from *Maxtodon*, Autumn/Winter 2016.

Niki wears hat, knitted Banana top, Double Boner Pillar skirt, and Pony duvet, from *Glitter*, Fall/Winter 2017.

Tanya wears Dagger robe with cowl neck, rib LS T-shirt, long bias skirt, from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022.

Right: Gimp vest and long Cargo skirt, Pentaboxer shorts, and knee-high Bogun boots.

Centre: Tanya wears cropped Klaus jacket, tank top, and AL skirt.

Left: Gimp vest and long Cargo skirt, Pentaboxer shorts, and knee-high Bogun boots.

All from from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022

Djo wears Knot vest jacket, tank top, Dirt cut-off shorts, and Spartan wader boots, from *Strobe*, Autumn/Winter 2022.

Benas wears SL Emotion top, drawstring Pannier Cargo trousers and Masto sneakers, from *Mastodon*, Autumn/Winter 2016.

Tyrone wears Bananabag dress, mini Shroud jacket, knitted sleeves, Stoicism veil, from *Glitter*, Fall/Winter 2017.

Djo wears Midi Mushroom jacket, Minimal Tank bodybag, and gloves, from *Mastodon*, Autumn/Winter 2016.

Edoardo wears Doll jacket, tank top, Cargo joggers, and Kiss boots, from *Larry*, Autumn/Winter 2019.

Sebastian wears Seahorse dress and Spartan wader boots, from *Sphinx*, Autumn/Winter 2015.

Tyrone wears slim Bodybag Flat Cargo, from *Mastodon*, Autumn/Winter 2016.

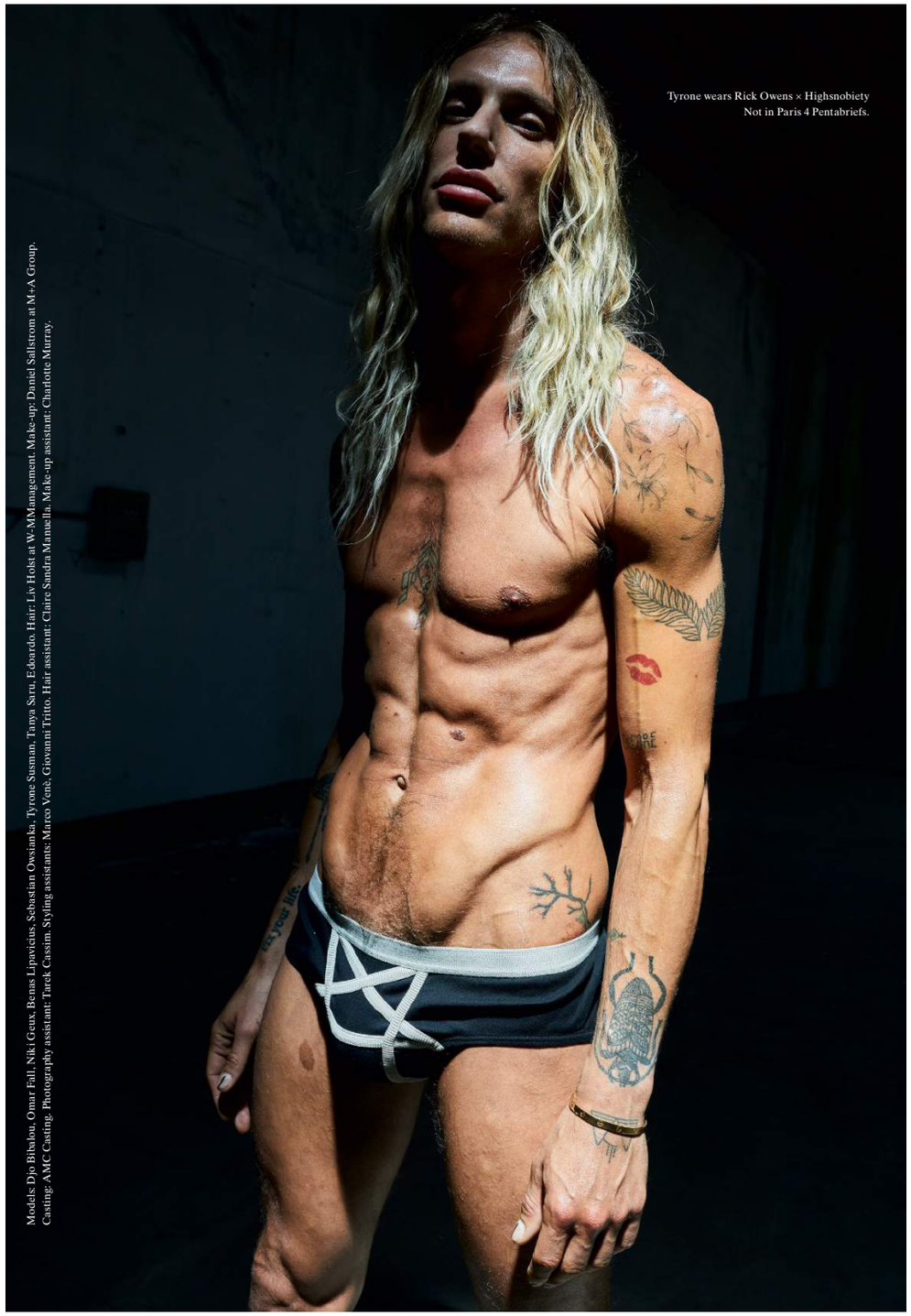
Benas wears SL Trunk T-shirt and Bulldozer trousers, from *Walrus*, Spring/Summer 2017.

Niki wears jumbo Gauntlet parka, Dylan T-shirt, long Cargo skirt, Pentaboxer shorts, knee-high Bogun boots, and small Fluoro helmet, from *Strobe*, Fall/Winter 2022.

Tanya wears Anuket jacket,
Seahorse round-neck dress,
and leggings, from *Sphinx*,
Autumn/Winter 2015.

Niki wears Stalacmite jacket,
Minimal Tank bodybag and gloves,
from *Mastodon*, Autumn/Winter 2016,
and Adidas × Rick Owens Tech Runner Stretch Boot.

Edoardo wears Dripping Torch top, from *Sphinx*, Autumn/Winter 2015, and Adidas × Rick Owens Vicious Sock Stretch Boot.

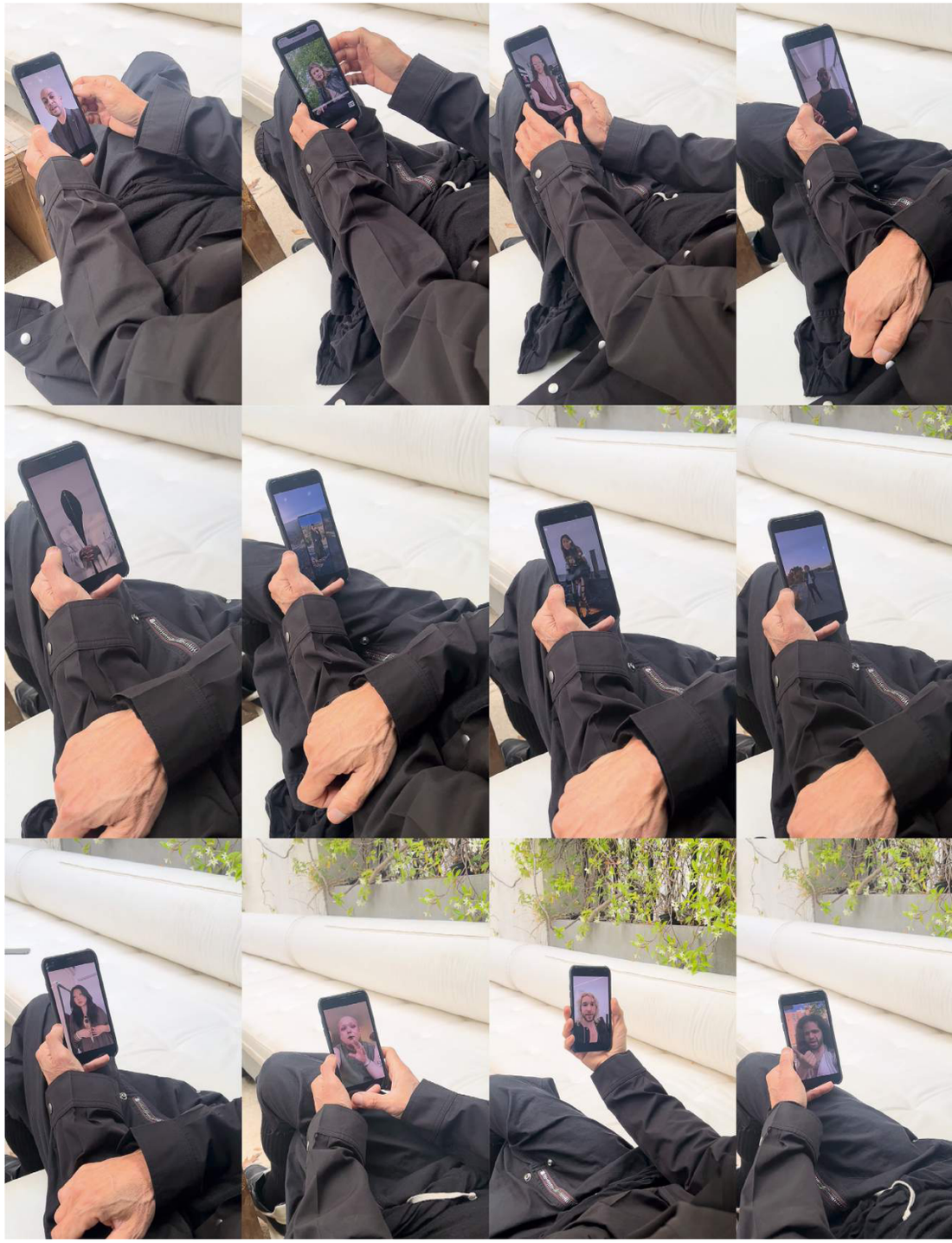


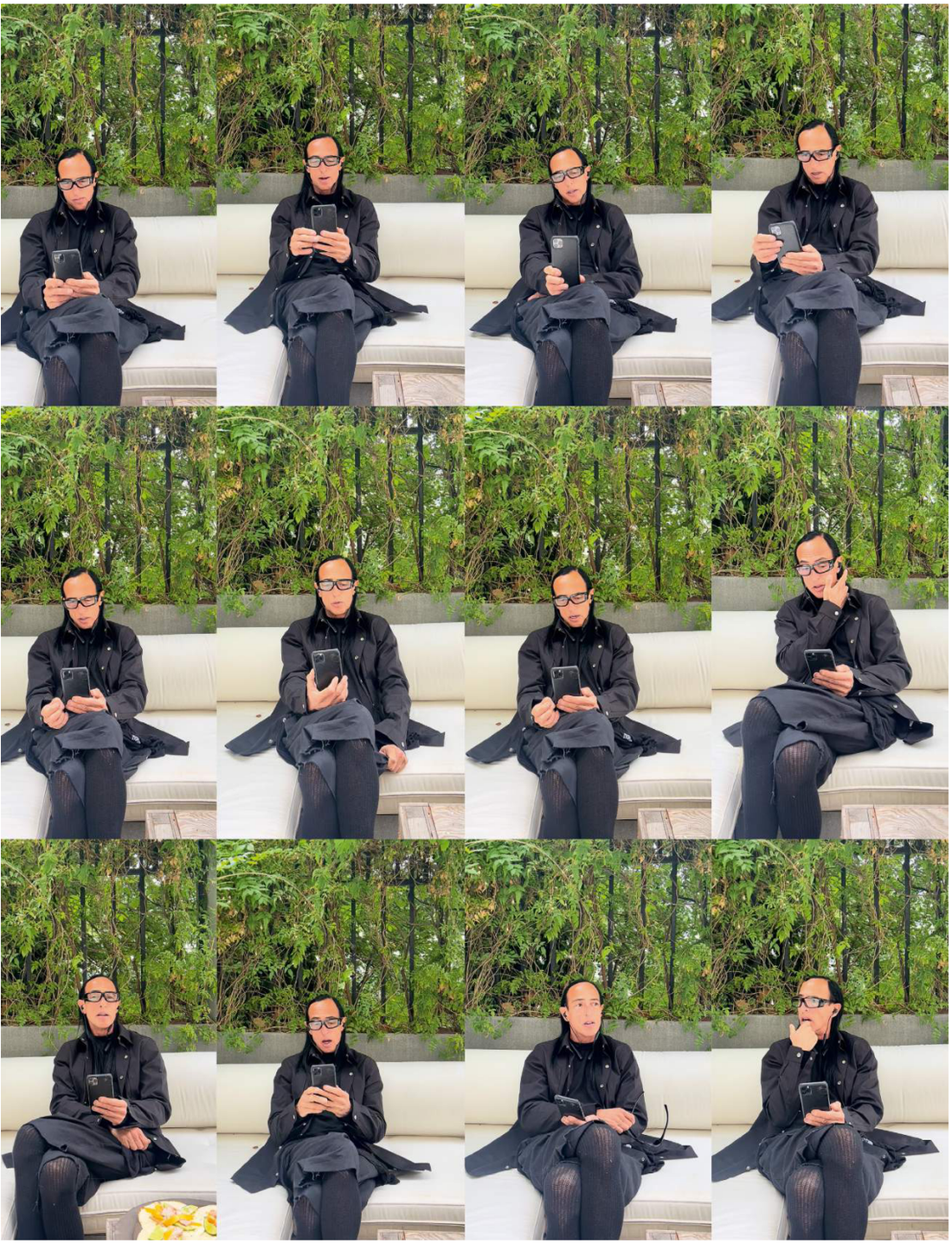
Tyrone wears Rick Owens × Highsnobiety Not in Paris 4 Pentabriefs.

Models: Djo Bihalou, Omar Fall, Niki Geux, Benas Lipavicius, Sebastian Owsianka, Tyrone Susman, Tanya Saru, Edoardo. Hair: Liv Holst at W-MManagement. Make-up: Daniel Sallstrom at M+A Group. Casting: AMC Casting. Photography assistant: Tarek Cassim. Styling assistants: Marco Vene, Giovanni Trifito. Hair assistant: Claire Sandra Manuella. Make-up assistant: Charlotte Murray.

‘Hey Rick, the one thing I’ve always wanted to ask you is...’

Devoted, discerning, disciples of dark glamour. Rick Owens’ most fervent fans meet their idol.





I'm currently reading a Joseph Beuys biography, which is very soothing. I feel that his was a self-contained world that I would kind of aspire to. I know that a lot of that is my own projection, my fantasy and my interpretation of who Joseph Beuys was, but I allow myself to romanticize it because that makes it more fun. I suspect that people do kind of the same with me. They are romanticizing me to fit their needs, and that's fine. I am happy to be some kind of symbol that they can elaborate on.

Conversely, I see myself in them, because we are all alike. The things I talk about in every show are primal, universal concerns about empathy, inclusion, exclusion, shame, pride, self-loathing, aggression, and the need for acceptance. By examining these things and by demystifying them, and by me reassuring other people that we have all felt and experienced them – that is what I think people have responded to.

Listening to these people's stories, seeing them looking so great in the looks we've designed, and answering their questions – it all makes me feel grateful that people have been able to connect to what I do. Everybody's main motivation in life is to be listened to, by their loved ones, by their children, by society. We all want to be heard, and to be able to do so is one of the most validating prizes in life. To be part of the lives of such intelligent and cultivated people is deeply, deeply emotionally satisfying. I sent out a message and people responded. That is the best you can ask for in life.

Rick Owens

Bob Colleran

I first became aware of Rick around eight years ago. I saw [Third Eye Blind musician] Stephan Jenkins wearing one of the T-shirts and had to have one. I love the brand because it approaches the sacred and highest domain of the art world, and references my formative interests, like fitness and vintage rock. It's unique and the most creatively powerful ready-to-wear brand.

Hey Rick, I see your brand is expanding into fog machines, strobe lamps and Aesop products. What can you see it branching out into next and how do you do that without eroding the integrity of your design language?
Rick Owens: That is the million-dollar question, expansion and movement. You want momentum, and I don't know how many T-shirts we have to sell to support every exaggerated runway piece that I make. It can get a little tricky. I mean, there is a lot that goes into supporting the creativity of this kind of venture, and at first I always wrote the whole expansion and collaboration thing off as hype, but it actually became kind of fun. Having been in this business for a while, I thought I might have isolated myself a bit too much and this was a chance to communicate with more people. Ironically, I always wanted to be as inclusive a brand as possible, but when you are a niche brand you end up excluding a lot of people who don't think it is for them. Fashion is communication – you want to have integrity, but you also want to be available to new people, those who are starting to develop their aesthetic but don't necessarily know what direction to go in. I guess you want to be discreet but available at the same time. I still haven't figured out the right balance, but I do know that we have to move forward and explore, and can't be self-satisfied and remain in a small corner resting on our laurels.

As for the fog machine [laughs], that was my favourite collab. I felt like it was an example of what collabs can be, instead of just hype money-making machines. They can be inventive partnerships that can create unusual alliances, and there is something positive about how you can ally yourself with someone you might not have considered before. There are benefits and there are disadvantages, where it seems like you're being exposed to too many people, but, you know, at this stage in the game, I have been doing it for 20 years, and we need to explore and to push ourselves to have some adventures. Thank you, Bob, for a very nice question. That outfit looks really great on you, too.

Eric Colón

I first became aware of Rick Owens through Internet forums around 2013, but it wasn't until 2016 that I actually began to wear pieces from the brand. To me, the brand is the opportunity to express myself in the most fun way through exciting clothing from an eccentric designer with a humble background. What makes Rick's brand unique is the consistent design language that I see across all his clothing, which brings synergy to everything, even across seasons. As for Rick himself, I've always appreciated how candid and self-deprecating he is in his interviews about his life, his inspirations, and his quirks.

Hey Rick, it's Eric. The one question I have always wanted to ask you, of all the colours you have released – black, milk, dark dust, dark shadow, throat, pearl, plum, toad, bean, DNA dust, all of that – which is your personal favourite?
Rick Owens: Well, obviously black is my favourite, but I like off-white, like wearing old white T-shirts, which have a lot of connotations for me. You know, the obvious Sid Vicious reference, but also Satyajit Ray movies, and Indian black-and-white movies made in the 1930s and 1940s. They told these delicately nuanced stories of family dynamics in Indian villages, and the people were always wearing modest, draped muslin garments with these kind of wide-necked, loose-stretch, off-white T-shirts. I was introduced to Satyajit Ray movies in the 1980s when I went to a festival. They were so moving because the stories they told were set in these very small villages in India but were universal stories of loving dynamics; they were so tender. To this day, I still have those movies on as background imagery because of the black and white and just the beauty. I like the mood they set for me. I will have them on while I'm showering, with some classical music like opera or something. Those T-shirts, that dingy white, that is the colour I love the most, along with black. I also like it when it's a bit tinged with grey and blue. Over the years we've had a million names for it, we've called it dinge, pearl, but one of the tips that I really learned over time is that it should never be whiter than your teeth. Because if you make the T-shirt dirtier than your teeth, then your teeth look whiter. That is my little beauty tip. Thank you for your question, Eric. That leopard-print chiffon jacket you're wearing is one of my favourite things; the pearl of that chiffon is actually a little on the blue-grey side. It came out just right and I'm glad that you have it.

Finn Delaney

I first became aware of Rick and his work when I was living in my small home town in the middle of Oxfordshire, England. I was obsessed with queer culture and the concept of what camp meant, but through a more sinister and 'dark lens'. My idols have always been performance artists and political activists such as David Hoyle, Leigh Bowery, and Pete Burns. Rick was the first brand I saw this in, and I have always felt aligned with its wicked sense of humour, glamour, and fierce eye for detail. The idea of having a 'dark glamour' approach to fashion is intoxicating to me. I can't get enough of it. Rick's clothes are sexy and complicated, but more importantly, they have a point of view. The brand and Rick himself have allowed me to find who I am, and through them I've found a community that loves queer culture and similar art. We're international, and those old punk or New Romantic cliques you saw on the Kings Road (à la Westwood's Worlds End) are now connected through the web, and we're all over the globe. That's why Rick is so unique and important to my life.

Rick, you've created a world that is sort of insular, but you have also now garnered an audience that transcends gender and age groups and race. How do you think you have done this and how do you think your audience reacts to it?

Rick Owens: Thank you, Finn, for your question. I think that originally I was frustrated at how limited the standards of contemporary beauty were. I felt that they were rigid and narrow and biased, and I'm going to use the word bigoted, and I thought I could put together something that might be an alternative to that. I don't mean to be stridently different, although it can seem like that, and even though I don't mean to, I probably am to a certain extent because it takes energy to promote something that is not standard. The idea was to be inclusive and to blur the boundaries of rigid aesthetics and allow more things to be considered beautiful.Ironically, I sometimes I think I have created this world that other people don't feel welcome in. I do regret that a little bit, but I do what I can to try and keep it as open as possible. That is why I am doing collaborations and stuff because we are showing a different part of our world – we are open. We have no barriers; we are friendly.

Finn, I think you are wearing a jumpsuit, I can't really tell, but I really love that fabric. It reminds me of cotton-candy twill, a very loosely woven silk polyamide that gives it an airy bizarre nylon feeling. It looks great on you, and I am glad you got that.

Fiona Luo

I first saw Rick's work on Tumblr around 2013. I work in fashion, and while I love the work of many designers, no other person or label's work has made me feel so completely myself. There is a particular relationship between body and fabric, a kind of symbiotic sensation that I get when I wear the clothes. There is an inherent comfort in knowing that this is how I am supposed to actualize my being. Plus, it is how I met the love of my life! I have eternal gratitude for that!

Hey Rick, so the question that I want to ask is: when do you feel the most truly aligned within yourself, and what role does fashion play in that? If it does. I am super-excited to hear what you have to say, because it is an answer I myself am constantly trying to find.

Rick Owens: Hi Fiona, when do I feel myself most truly aligned? I think that's when I am in a garden the week before I have to launch a collection. I have a real sense of purpose; I have enough resources I think, so I can use what I have got to come up with the best solution, and the role that fashion plays in that. I don't really know any more if I am thinking about clothes or about a sculptural, light enhancement kind of thing. I am thinking about clothes and construction, but I am also kind of thinking about a sense of being. Does that sound really super pretentious? Maybe, but I think one of my strengths is that I have always been able to look at the big picture. You know the phrase, you can't see the forest for the trees; well, I think I am pretty good at seeing the forest. The downside to that is that I get impatient unless I can find the straightest line from point A to point B. I don't enjoy the processes so much; I am very goal orientated.

Sorry, I kind of lost my train of thought… you are asking about when I feel most centred. That period during a collection when there is *every* possibility, and the results could be perfect, fantastic and transcendent. That creative period where you're about to execute something and it could be the greatest thing you've ever done – it has the potential to be perfect – that is a very centred moment, when you are kind of pulling out and applying everything you have learned. That's a pretty delicious place to be, and I guess it takes a while to get there. You can't count on having it all the time. By the way, the dress you're wearing is one of my favourite ever, which I guess might be obvious because we always keep it in the collection, and I feel like it is a signature shape. It looks very pretty on you.

Franklin Logan

I am a 3D artist and developer based out of Las Vegas. My wife Ina – who's also participating in this! – and I have been into fashion and more specifically, Rick's clothes, since we started dating nearly a decade ago. I first became aware of Rick Owens when I saw his work posted on online forums. I was instantly hooked. Fashion to me has always been about projecting outward who you are within, and how that sincerity can actually serve you as a suit of armour. The initial appeal of the bold aesthetic is what drew me in, but reading more about him, it was the unapologetic self-expression within Rick's character that helped solidify him as my favourite. All of his work is a reflection of who he is – and we can all use a reminder to approach our work and our lives with more sincerity.

Hey, Rick. You have mentioned before that you have each collection inside of you and it's just a question of unearthing it. But this thing you unearth resonates with so many people around the world. Do you feel this part of you is something you have cultivated over the years? Is it these lived experiences that resonate with people or is it something innate to you that touches something innate to everyone else?

Rick Owens: Hey, Franklin, thank you for your question. I do feel like I have every collection inside me and I just have to untangle it, but that came after a long period of accumulating and studying a lot of ideas and information and visuals and art and literature. At some point my favourite things started rising to the surface and I just became someone who created compositions of those things. These were things that a lot of people related to, and they appreciated these compositions. I think of it like poetry, kind of like a haiku, where you set a few words against each other, and they create a mood. That's what I think I've done. It is not an innate thing; I didn't invent anything. I just took what was out there in the world and rearranged it to create my own interpretation that might be unique to me but which is familiar enough to a lot of other people, so that ultimately it turns into a thing. I think I was lucky enough to have a knack for that, in the same way that some of us are good at cooking, some are good at sports or other things.
You know, nobody can really explain it completely because otherwise it would be too easy to replicate, and that's the magic. There is mystery to how something like this stays up in the air. Thank you for your question; it was fun to answer.

Jessie Zhao

I first became aware of Rick through my husband around five years ago. I love the brand because it is uncompromising and enables me to feel my most confident. I have had a journey of learning and making friends and family with the brand and the greater art world.

Hey Rick, out of your entire career, what was the moment when you felt most proud of yourself?
Rick Owens: Hey, Jessie. Wow! You look amazing. That's from the last show; Michèle wore a version of it. When was I the proudest? Well, there have been a few moments. I think, I got a little bit teary at my last menswear show, when I played this Sisters of Mercy song that I used to listen to over and over again when I was in my twenties. When I think of that period, what I can remember of it, I felt like I had potential, but I was afraid of not fulfilling it, so there was fear and frustration, because I felt like I might not make it. Listening to that song over and over again at the time, and then being able to play that song in Paris at full blast, with really good lights and really good models, for a collection that I really liked… I kind of luxuriated in the satisfaction of having travelled all that way and having fulfilled the potential that I thought I had then. That was a very satisfying and emotional moment.
The other moment that comes to mind was when I did a retrospective at the Triennale Museum in Milan. They allowed me to curate it myself, so being able to kind of celebrate what I thought were my successes and eliminate any flaws or the mistakes that I thought I had made. I was able to present myself *and* interpret myself, which felt like a unique position. Well, I guess Instagram is totally like that: you are presenting the person you want to be, the best aspects and the most flattering angles, and you are *creating*. I don't think anyone else would think of Instagram this way, but what I thought about when I was doing that Triennale, that museum retrospective, was that it was like an obituary, not in a gloomy way, but rather: I am in control of my narrative; I am able to summarize who I am, who I was, both now and for any retrospective I might have in the future. It felt monumental, seeing it collected all together; I just kind of luxuriated in that. It was a pretty big moment for me. Thank you for that question. Your outfit is super fierce!

Ina Clavano

My name is Ina, and I first became aware of Rick around 10 years ago now. I'm based in Las Vegas with my husband Franklin, and we used to share runway looks and 'fit pics' of people wearing and styling Rick Owens. As pre-career kids who were broke we only dreamed of having enough of his pieces to feel the magic and self-assurance his clothing radiates when worn. That is part of the reason why Rick Owens is so important to me – there is an essence and transcendental nature in his designs. It's not just wearable art but a wearable emotion. It feels like armour for the everyday world, even with the simplest pieces. Despite the enchantment that his clothing encapsulates, it is still very human – because of him, because he is not afraid to admit or forget or remind us all that he is just human. He creates the balance that he believes in and contributes it to the world.

Hey Rick, you often talk about the anger of your youth, and how it truly manifested in your art and contributions to the world. Do you think that the deep anger and pain that a person can't escape can be beautiful, or if given the chance would you be rid of yours completely? Thanks for everything.
Rick Owens: Hi, Ina, good question. I guess I wouldn't; I would like to make sure though that I don't overindulge, because a lot of people have pain and discomfort, and mine hasn't been that special. I do wonder, had I been completely tranquil and serene as a child, would that have made me not have the energy to react. When I think back, I am grateful for situations that made me want to react. Maybe I just enjoy holding resentment because I am a Scorpio, and we are supposedly resentful.
I think that to be creative you have to have a certain sensitivity to things, and maybe I have that awareness. We all have our strengths. There is no recipe, but I assume that what I have been able to do creatively has been a response to things that happened to me earlier. I don't want to make it sound like I was abused or anything, not at all, but I was just really sensitive, and I ended up where I shouldn't have been. But it all worked out, didn't it? Oh, and that kaftan that you're wearing, I try and put it in every collection because I think it is one of our pieces that kind of says it all. It's sexy and opulent, and it takes up a lot of space around you. It is kind of formal and this world can be so informal and messy. You're actually reminding me that we have to make sure we have that dress in every possible fabric in the collection, so thank you for wearing it.

Kenny Rufino

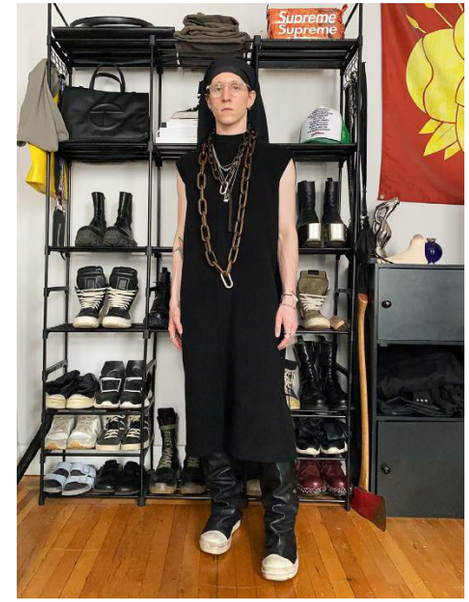
I probably first heard about Rick Owens around 2003-2004 but really became a fan a few years later when the first New York store opened on Hudson. The Rick Owens universe connected with me because I felt attributes of the brand that have been instrumental to me personally, like expressing your individuality, developing a distinct point of view, living with your contradictions. How Rick and his work continue to evolve into new forms, inspire discourse, and redefine our sociocultural milieu is inspiring and rare. I don't know where his vision will go next, but I know I'll be there for the ride.

Hi Rick, if you had the ability to go back in time and ask just one question to any one person in history, who would that person be and what would you ask?
Rick Owens: Hi Kenny, I like your look. I'm sure I should come up with someone way more intellectual and esoteric, but the first person who comes to mind, is Salvador Dalí, and I would ask him to design my house. I am fascinated with how he navigated his life. Just his mind-bending way of thinking, like creating that sculpture of Alice Cooper's brain out of croissants and ants. Oh, and when he said, 'I don't do drugs, I *am* drugs.' There is a Helmut Newton picture of Salvador Dalí shortly before his death that I look at every day; he is in a wheelchair wearing a satin gown with oxygen tubes up his nose. I like his sense of absurdity and no limits, and anything can happen, and Dadaism. I never want to forget that you can do anything; you can slip and slide and turn into anything and turn inside out. I just like the idea of being able to live in an environment led by that kind of attitude. I hope that was a satisfying enough answer to your question, Kenny.

Matt Campo

I had been mildly familiar with Rick's clothes since 2009, but coming across the men's Fall/Winter 2014 lookbook shot by Rick Castro while browsing some random fashion website was a real eye opener. It was the first time I'd truly found a connection with the brand on a personal level. The shoot was subversive and beautiful: stoic, intergenerational male form, leather-fetish aesthetics, the severe cult-like clothes. I was hooked and immediately dived down the rabbit hole into the world of Rick Owens. The brand contains multitudes; I find it the perfect vehicle for disrupting the everyday. Every piece possesses a level of consideration that carries through any occasion or circumstance: from peak cosy pandemic work-from-home daily issue to obscenely sculptural runway pieces. Rick Owens works as well for a gala dinner as it does when just popping out to grab groceries. Either way, people take notice.

Hey Rick, over the course of your career, you have reintroduced and interpolated ideas and themes from earlier collections, sometimes many years apart from their debut – it's almost a Wagnerian sensibility of leitmotif. Do you have a favourite idea, pattern or concept that you have brought back from an earlier collection, and do you think it was more successfully executed the second time around? Thanks!
Rick Owens: Hey Matt, I know exactly what you're saying, but I think I only have a certain number of things in my toolbox, so I am going to repeat myself a lot. I admit that there have been times in the past when I didn't have full control of all of my resources and powers, so I hadn't learned yet how to execute things in a certain way. So it's been a pleasure to go back and look at it anew from a different angle, and repeat, maybe repair, maybe enhance or just enjoy repeating in a different way. I think there is a good lesson there – if you had a good idea once, why should it disappear, why not reintroduce it and why not celebrate it? Good ideas don't necessarily need to be discarded for the novelty of something new. If something is good, it is worth repeating.
One of my biggest life lessons is that you *can* go back and repair things, and this applies to mistakes in relationships, too. I have gone back, and I have made amends to people. This isn't like a 12-step thing – I never did that – but you can think back on someone that you felt you didn't treat as well as you wanted to and do something about it. Good question Matt, and I'm glad you're wearing that top, it looks good on you.



Michael Smith

I first became aware of Rick Owens when I was a sophomore in college and still dressed very preppy. At the time I wasn't a very big fan, but in a short time I grew obsessed. Rick is obviously my favourite clothing brand, and I feel very confident and comfortable in his clothes. Through the brand I have also met several of my friends in New York, and many other people who I have a lot in common with besides clothing taste. Rick's defining feature has always been world building, how he creates a look so specific and so recognizable that it becomes difficult to own anything besides Rick. Everything he makes fits seamlessly into his archive of work, and it is possible to create many different styles using just Rick.

Hello, Rick. I'm wondering if there's anything you've wanted to do with your brand that you haven't been able to accomplish yet – like an object you've wanted to make or a runway concept you've wanted to do – and if so, what that might be?
Rick Owens: Hi, Michael, the first thing that comes to mind is one time when we wanted to do a runway show and set the models on fire. I was sure that we could do it, and I pushed and pushed and pushed. I know that inside the Palais de Tokyo in the 1950s, they had done an installation with fire, but for some reason with contemporary legalities and safety regulations, it just wasn't the time to set people on fire in the gallery itself. Then Kanye did it in a stadium show in the Midwest or somewhere; I mean a *huge* arena, granted. But, yeah, models on fire, I am disappointed I didn't get to do that.
As far as collections go, I suppose there have been industrial and technical blocks in the past, but part of the fun of what I do is taking a set amount of resources and learning, and coming up with a satisfying solution within a limited amount of time. That's the puzzle and the challenge, and there is restraint in that; a certain amount of modesty, thriftiness and resourcefulness that you have to apply.
People sometimes ask me if I ever want to explore more architecturally, but I am kind of satisfied with transforming the environments that I'm in. I understand the ambition of architecture, but I don't know if I could handle the lack of speed because I am so used to the runway cycle. I've probably become addicted to it. I try not to be too greedy, and I am trying to do things within integrity. So, yeah, I think more about everything I have gotten more than what I have missed out on, and I have gotten more than I ever expected or imagined – I am not complaining. Thank you, Michael.

Oliver Suchanek

I'm 27, live in London, and I'm an aircraft engineer. I was a bit of a skater kid growing up, with the goths and the scene kids, so my fashion background is ripped skinny denim, trashed tees, Vans and hoodies. I think the first time I became aware of Rick was when I was around 18 or 19, when for some reason I tuned into the Autumn/Winter 2013 *Plinth* show. It was a eureka moment for me when I realized that clothes aren't just clothes; they could be gritty and dirty and all the things I was wearing as a kid, but just done differently. Rick is an inspiration and I've stuck with the brand essentially for the 10 years I've been into fashion. I've developed my tastes and my image alongside Rick as he has developed through the eras of his collections. It's inspired and pushed me into wearing things that I never thought I could possibly pull off. A big part of the label's uniqueness is the constant development and morphing of itself; you can see previous collections in current collections, but in a way that isn't derivative, stale or boring.

Hi Rick, I tend to jump between creative projects too quickly and I don't dedicate enough time to each one. As someone who has a lot of creative projects going, how do you ensure that you dedicate enough time to each one without rushing?

Rick Owens: Hi Oliver, I don't know if I'm qualified to answer that question because I don't know if I've mastered it. I am conscious that you have to have a certain kind of momentum to get to a certain level and when you do that there are things that slip through the cracks. I do wonder if I am going to look back and regret how many things I let slip through; it is frustrating that you can't have your finger on every single thing, but there has to be an element of trust. I trusted too much at some points in my career and things fell apart, or I didn't trust at all and held the reigns too tightly and was too uptight, and that didn't work either. Then there are the times when I found the right balance, where I trusted enough and allowed people to participate in a comfortable way, and I got the results that I wanted. It is a kind of a constant balance you have to try and maintain, and it is really tricky. Because you have to work with a lot of people who are putting their own personal emotional investments into something with you, and you have to respect that. Being able to respect it and direct it and collaborate with that kind of emotional force, that is a fragile and delicate thing. And it's not like I am a master of it. But good luck with that. If you are conscious of it Oliver, then you are already looking for an answer, and that's a positive thing.

William Braggadocio

In a past career, I was a buyer for a Chicago boutique called Gallery Aesthete. I was lucky enough to travel to the Rick Owens showrooms and runway shows. I now work in TV and film production as an assistant costume designer, but I still make a point of keeping up with the Rick Owens brand. I discovered Rick Owens back in high school when I was viewing some collections (embarrassingly, I recall it was Dolce and Gabbana). It was his *Crust* collection [Autumn/Winter 2009]. At that moment, something flipped on in me. It felt like I had been looking for this, and it fell into my lap. Ever since, I have been deeply enamoured with his brand. Personally, Rick Owens is essential to my everyday. Every piece I collect feels like adding art to my life. It makes my world feel a little more beautiful and special.

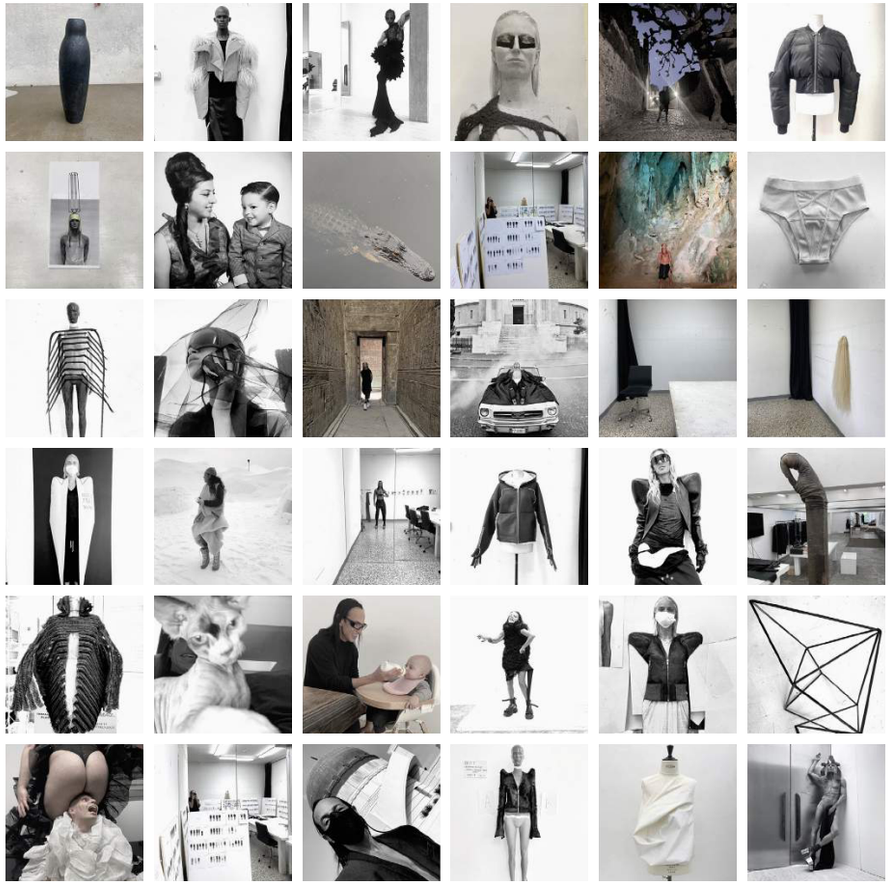
Hello, Mr Owens, what would you say is a transcendent moment in your career as a designer?

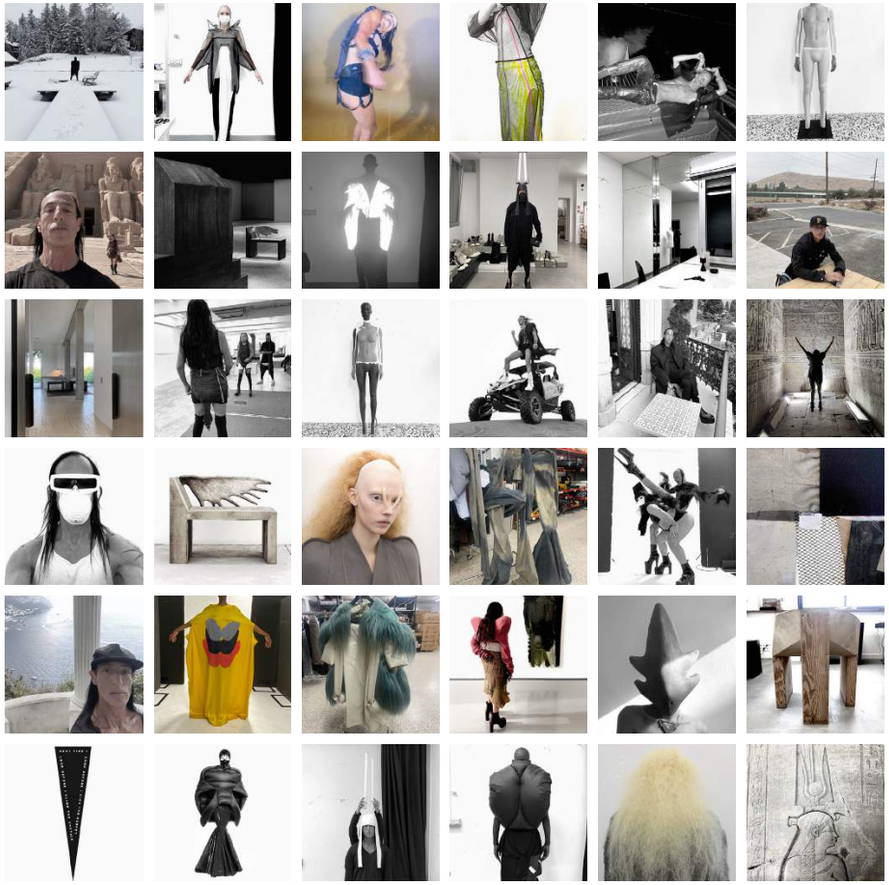
Rick Owens: Hi, William. I have had more transcendent moments than I ever really had the imagination to think of. As a designer, people sometimes ask me about the high of the runway show, and there *is* a high, but to me the runway-show experience is always one of great peace. I feel a sense of satisfaction, like it's a good solution to a puzzle; like I have been able to come up with a decent convincing plausible story, using the limited resources and time that I had. You work hard to make sure it happens. It is not like I leave a lot of elements to chance, I am the one there guiding it along and making sure it comes out the way I want it to. I am not saying that in a gloating way because it takes a lot of effort to make that happen and I put that effort in. It is not exactly transcendent, but it is deeply satisfying because everything falls into place, and you get to see the final results. That little emotional transcendent moment comes when I feel like, 'Oh I have got enough elements in this story for it now to truly work.' I think that might be transcendent and that usually happens a week before I have to launch the collection, usually on a Saturday night, late at night, in an empty factory in the middle of nowhere in Italy, when I am by myself.

Besides that, there have been times I remember being high on a dance floor, and feeling like that's the most transcendent thing I could think of on a Saturday night, but being alone in a factory and having everything fall into place – that might be transcendence for me now. Thanks again for your question, William.

Camera roll

By Rick Owens





The value of fashion

For the Ukrainian founder of 1 Granary, our global industry offers hope. By Olya Kuryshchuk. Photograph by Guillaume Blondiau.

How can you care about fashion when you know that 1,500 miles from where you are children are sheltering from bombs? Let me explain. Caring about fashion comes easily to me because they've never been *just clothes* to me. They couldn't have been. Growing up in post-Soviet Ukraine, my generation was the first that could realistically access a new world, one that had previously only revealed itself in magical glimpses on the television. Fashion was the great escape, an undiscovered territory where imagination was considered a valuable currency, rather than a game for children.

I completed a law degree before I found the courage to admit to my friends and family that I was moving to London to study fashion – a proposition that was met with instant ridicule. 'You're passing up the opportunity to become a judge to be a seamstress?' To them, the idea that I could ever join the people we saw on the pages of those imported magazines was laughable; I might as well have announced I was moving to the moon. Luxury and glamour weren't ours to claim.

I didn't care; I didn't need to be accepted. I would get to observe from the shadows. That attitude got me a long way, because every experience, every exhausting internship or devastating critique, felt like an exciting new opportunity.

As I was studying to become a designer, fashion did what fashion does best: create a community. I found myself inside a circle of other unusual backstories and funny accents, and it dawned on me: if we learn more about the fashion system, we might actually create a space for ourselves outside of the shadows. My curiosity and eagerness to understand the industry became my greatest advantage. I asked questions to anyone who was willing to answer and shared the results on a website. Those were the foundations of 1 Granary, which is today a global support network of designers, schools and brands, and my home away from home.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February, the doors I had spent my formative years discovering flew open before I had even had a chance to knock. From every corner of the industry, friends, colleagues, and strangers offered their support. Fashion journalists and editors helped me inform their global readership on the realities of the war; graphic designers created posters and infographics to spread the word even further; and stylists and agents organized clothing and material supplies for refugees. I was offered donations and logistical contacts for my fellow citizens, transport and places to stay for my family. It's horrifying that it takes something so profoundly evil to realize how incredibly kind the world is.

That was the moment fashion became more than just a dream, when I realized I could use my skills and network to help. That might sound delusional, but I can assure you that reaching out to your contacts for practical support feels a whole lot better than sitting in front of the news in tears.

During those first days of the war, I did – briefly – have trouble imagining ever caring about clothes again. When your home country is under attack, when the lives of your parents, brothers, nieces, and high-school friends are at risk, when everything you took for granted is suddenly threatened, you don't want to think about anything that doesn't concern their immediate safety. That included fashion, until the fear and anxiety turned into activism when I understood how powerful the business can be: we have supply chains connecting countries across the globe; media reaching masses of followers everywhere; and a shared, universal language of creativity.

I recently noticed that many of my friends in London have stopped sharing their personal news with me. Group chats that were previously filled with happy career updates or fun industry gossip suddenly turned quiet. When I pressed them about the silence, they confessed that people were feeling guilty about coming to me with anything that didn't relate to the war. They hadn't understood how much fashion means to me right now. After having so much taken away, to have something I love so much means the world – fashion is what allows me to keep going.

There is no shame in recognizing and appreciating something good while you have it. I've experienced first-hand how fast loss can come – and I've learned that as long as you're alive, you have to keep living.

3 May 2022

Stoicism and optimism

Vogue Ukraine's fashion director on work as an act of resistance. By Venya Brykalin. Photograph by Guillaume Blondiau.

On 21 February, Russia's president made a public address to his nation. In an hour-long speech he put forward a bizarre idea about Ukraine and its people: there is no such country or culture, so neither has a reason to exist without Russian interference. In all its glorious nonsense the speech filtered down the Telegram channels that we, in Ukraine, have been using to get our news on what would eventually become a war. In a way, it was the opening salvo of the conflict.

What BS, I thought, as I processed it the following morning. The *Vogue* Ukraine team was finalizing details of my fashion week trips to Milan and Paris, but I wasn't sure I should go, as the sense of something terrible coming was already in the air. We didn't openly talk about it, but everyone felt it. Then it clicked for me. If Russian propaganda is trying to erase us and make it look like we don't exist, like we're a joke and a historical inaccuracy in some greater imperialistic narrative, what we *should* do is stand tall and be proud of who we are. We *have to* show up and be there for the whole world to see.

Usually, going to shows in Europe feels like an extended alcohol-infused business trip. This time it was both dramatic and painful. My plane landed in Bergamo airport in Italy, just four hours before the Russians started bombarding Ukraine. To this day, almost three months later, they haven't stopped their attempt to erase us, culturally and physically. It's what we wake up to and go to bed with. It's in every conversation and every phone call with our families, our loved ones and our friends.

Taking that flight from Kyiv to attend a Max Mara show the following morning changed my life. Because today, I know how privileged I am, writing this letter from a cosy apartment in Paris' sixth *arrondissement* that a friend of a friend has kindly allowed me to stay in. I am lucky to sleep in my own bed, to be able to work remotely, and even to have a job.

Out of all my *Vogue* Ukraine team I am the only one who hasn't physically experienced war. I don't wake up to the chilling sounds of air-raid warnings; I don't spend my days trying to move to safer areas (there are no *safe* areas in Ukraine right now); nor do I sleep in the metro stations that people use as bomb shelters. Our art director Sergei did just that. Our beauty editor Alyona spent weeks cooking for military personnel and volunteers in a collective kitchen, while still working online for the magazine. She then switched to cleaning floors; she told me she found it therapeutic.

The stoicism and optimism of the Ukrainian people is contagious, and I've never felt so proud. Everyone I know is involved. At *Vogue* Ukraine, we've put print operations on hold, but our brilliant online team has recalibrated the website, running stories on surviving chemical attacks and sexual abuse. My usually perfectly groomed influencer friends are now crowdfunding to buy trucks and equipment for military and defence use. Designers and artists are organizing garage sales and auctions to donate funds to humanitarian efforts.

In early May, my ex-colleague at *Vogue* Ukraine, Sonya Kvasha, and I launched a three-part pop-up project in a soon-to-open Charlotte Chesnais store in Paris. This space, with its very bourgeois address on the Boulevard Saint Germain, alongside Ralph Lauren and Gucci, has become an entry point to discovering Ukrainian culture. It has handwoven rugs by Oksana Levchenya (a hit with customers); naively painted ceramics by Gunia Project (a friend of mine has put one of the duo's Easter plates next to his Ai Weiwei); and vibrant linen blouses by Vita Kin decorated with delicate embroidery of the Tree of Life and penises. There is also a sculpture by Maria Kulikovska, a refugee from Crimea since its annexation by Russia in 2014: a soap cast of the artist's own naked body with brutal traces of gun shots. We sourced the sculpture in a private collection in Munich and drove it to Paris as we heard the first reports of serial rapes and torture in Bucha and Irpin.

We all live a double life now. One is about trying get back to work, talking to people, and getting things done. Another is living through the constant stream of news about wounded soldiers locked in the Azovstal steelworks and the city of Mariupol being wiped off the face of the earth; about mass graves in Vynohradne; and children, handicapped and blinded by missiles, who still have their lives to live, and the thousands who don't. Yet we keep working – that's part of the resistance. At *Vogue* Ukraine, we are now cooking up our next issue. No one I talk to has any doubt that there will be another *Vogue* issue – and it will be a Victory special.

15 May 2022

Yours, exclusively

How a 'newsletter about shopping' became fashion's most coveted read. By Rachel Tashjian. Photograph by Guillaume Blondiau.

I wish I'd had a grand, devious master plan when I launched the newsletter Opulent Tips in the deep demonic winter of 2020. Mostly, I missed being funny online – having a place where I felt I could play completely, frivolously, and in my own voice – and was a bit tired of getting direct messages on Instagram and Twitter asking me about the best motorcycle boots (Ann Demeulemeester); the least-known movies with amazing style (Robert Altman's canon!); and whether it was a good idea to buy things from brands they had discovered on Instagram (no). As I think back, I also recall that I was irrationally infuriated (as I so often am!) with the kinds of products and brands that my smart, otherwise well-informed friends were talking about. On top of which, they seemed to know or care nothing about Wales Bonner, Kiko Kostadinov or Marine Serre, or what upcycling and slow fashion are, or the incredible revolution happening in fashion photography. For example.

I wanted a place to act a little crazy, unapologetically so, and Substack (and other platforms) seemed to cultivate a strangely uniform tone of chilled amiability in too many writers. Plus, creating a Substack smacks of 'I've got some personal news…', and I didn't want to leave my job as a journalist (I was then at *GQ*, as the magazine's first fashion critic) to write a newsletter about shopping.

The only option – or at least the most mischievous one – was to send it out by email in what I deemed cheekily a 'natural-style' newsletter. This meant I'd have to manually enter every recipient's email each week, which would be no problem because I figured only about 50 people – my close friends and some of theirs – would want to read it anyway. I joked that it was 'invitation only'.

As it turns out, many more than 50 people wanted to read it. I have turned down most of the reader requests – the way I do things is just too unwieldy – but still, I now have some 1,500 readers, which includes many important people holding this magazine and many 17-year-olds who feel wistful about the decades before they were born. (I try to prioritize those two groups.) I've attempted to make sense of the success for the past 17 months. Is it because it feels exclusive? Well, yeah. Is it because it is hard to get on the list? Probably. But it's also because people feel refreshed and energized by this admittedly old-school way of writing about fashion. There's a lot of apologizing or equivocation in fashion writing today, and rarely are young people offered enough access or confidence to write with authoritative panache. (Admittedly, a lot of young fashion writers just haven't read and studied enough of our forebears.) I see people overanalyse podcasts, 'prestige' television, and other garbage from all across the pop-cultural stratosphere, and that kind of attention is always considered *serious* without regret. Yet, seeing fashion as a subculture, with characters and peculiarities, feels fresh to those of us under 40.

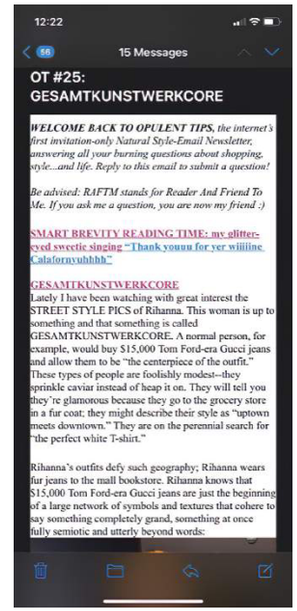
Every time I encountered some quirk of the system, I looked to the readers and shaped things to accommodate their requests. (Once, someone asked me for a fashion bibliography, and instead I recommended things based on the most recent fictions reads of anyone who cared to reply. It was chaos! As you can tell, I love chaos.) Readers asked if they could share it; I suggested they take screenshots. They wanted merch; I said that buying something recommended on Opulent Tips was my equivalent of merch. (A lot of merch is pretty wasteful.) The sharing of screenshots and bragging about vintage finds sourced through the newsletter, and in many cases even just tweeting that you've received the latest edition, has created a community that extends beyond the publication itself. To read it is to understand a certain sensibility, I guess, or at least to feel like you're in on something impossible. The trick is that almost nothing I link to is really expensive; I'm a vintage hound, and most people are not wackadoos like me who will scrimp pennies together for months to procure a $1,300 jacket, no matter how many beads it's festooned with. Often we're merely there together in the email to appreciate, or come to a better understanding of, a designer or a trend, rather than buy. If anything, I just want everyone to feel more confident at the clothing rack, whether it's in a store or in their closet. As a result, the newsletter often takes on a Vreelandish cheerleader tone.

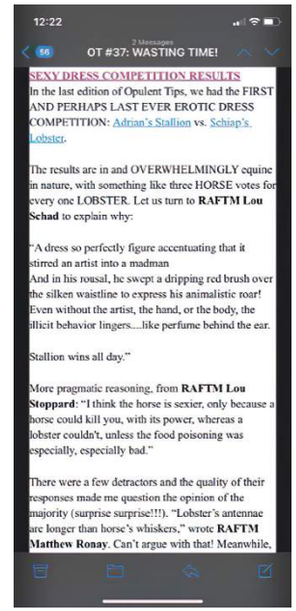
I figured only about 50 people – my close friends and some of theirs – would want to read it anyway. I joked that it was 'invitation only'.

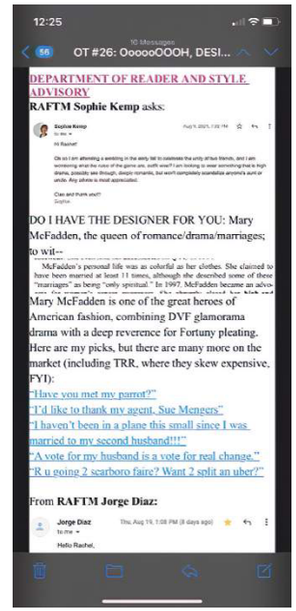
A typical issue includes an introductory essay from me that might cover anything from the Tom Ford going-out top, to a reconsideration of the word 'chic', to the Mike Nichols heroine, to solutions to what I call NOEYY or Not Owning Enough Yohji Yamamoto. I rarely link to my professional work, though I might occasionally, because a little fashion gossip ('Jonathan Anderson took us to the Boiler Room!' or 'Stop asking Matthieu Blazy to fix brands and give him his own!', which I wrote in late 2020, ha!) feels John Fairchildish in all the right ways. I once made a chart of all the brands I cared about on an axis from 'hype-free consumer to influencer' and 'art world to fashion world'; another time, I staged an 'erotic dress competition' in which I asked readers to explain which of Schiaparelli's lobster dress or Adrian's stallion frock was the sexiest. People share the screenshots on Instagram and Twitter and wishful subscribers pick through them for a taste of the week's missive. This is especially true, it seems, when I complain about things, like the general state of fashion writing or what passes for sustainable fashion, and it feels like I can rant with my taste as a weapon, which is a nice reprieve. It's not that I'm afraid of getting cancelled in my other writing – LOL – more that I reserve that space to make the case with hard reporting, which especially in fashion, is difficult and rewarding, and therefore an essential skill to me.

You might wonder, then, why I do this when I already have a full-time job and am established as a fashion critic and reporter. Strangely but perhaps most importantly, doing it has codified my sense of the integrity of my work. A lot of writing today – especially if you're a woman – is performing online and cultivating a persona, which often comes at the expense of the actual work. (This is ironic because the best literary personalities – Tom Wolfe, Eve Babitz, Toni Morrison – were savagely ambitious and obsessive writers. Except Fran Lebowitz, and I hope she's not reading this.) Or maybe that's not true. I think we tend to prioritize the personality over the work it takes to become important, or legendary, or even just the type of person who not only gets assignments but delivers the goods. I didn't want *just* to perform, and giving myself a dedicated space to 'perform' in – where I would brandish my taste and point of view as an alternative means to examine the culture of clothes – has allowed me to focus on telling stories through interviews, research, and careful weeks or months of observation. It's much harder and therefore very sacred to me, though being a fashion persona (even if only to a few) is pretty fun, too.

In terms of pure Tips, I think there's a future for publications that speak to the most niche audience, that project authority about their subject matter, and most of all, that treat fashion as an exciting, rich, textured subject that does not require us to justify ourselves, or worse, explain away our interests. There's a future for writing in fashion, for both commentary and criticism in addition to reporting, for a sense of intellectual playfulness and ambiguity, which is what the format of the letter allows. My readers and I have an implicit understanding that this is my opinion and mine alone – I don't want them to do as I say or do, but rather to bring a new level of curiosity to their lives and scepticism to their purchases.







‘All three independent, all three unique.’

Glenn Martens reflects on his season of juggling Y/Project, Diesel and Gaultier Couture.

Interview by Rana Toofanian
Photographs by Charlotte Wales
Styling by Ursina Gysi

Previous page
Natasha wears Diesel Autumn/Winter 2022.

This page
Natasha wears pink metallic top and
Canada Goose × Y/Project puffer jacket
by Y/Project menswear Autumn/Winter 2020.

Natasha wears gold top, velvet hoodie dress, and
python heels by Y/Project Autumn/Winter 2017.

Natasha wears striped body, corset and skirt, platform heels and black earrings by Jean Paul Gaultier by Glenn Martens couture Spring/Summer 2022.

Natasha wears brown suede coat and leather thigh boots by Y/Project Autumn/Winter 2022.

Diane and Jasmine wear Diesel
Autumn/Winter 2022.

Diane and Jasmine wear Diesel
Autumn/Winter 2022.

Redouane wears grey sweater and jogging trousers, Y/Project menswear Autumn/Winter 2017 and sneakers by Y/Project × Fila.

Natasha wears cow-skin bustier and mini denim shorts by Y/Project Spring/Summer 2017 and black shoes by Jean Paul Gaultier by Glenn Martens couture Spring/Summer 2022.

Left to right: Redouane wears top and jeans by Diesel Spring/Summer 2022 and boots by Diesel Autumn/Winter 2022.
Natasha wears top, skirt and shoes by Y/Project Spring/Summer 2022.
Lorenzo wears Diesel Autumn/Winter 2020.

Natasha wears dress with embroidered pearls, legging shorts, mules and earrings by Y/Project Spring/Summer 2018.

Natasha wears grey suit, white hoodie, boots and silver 'hand' by Y/Project Spring/Summer 2017.

Natasha wears black dress, shoes and gold earrings by Jean Paul Gaultier by Glenn Martens couture Spring/Summer 2022.

Redouane wears top, jogging trousers, bag and shoes by Y/Project Spring/Summer 2022 and sunglasses and ring by Diesel.

Lorenzo wears double T-shirt, cargo trousers, and UGG boots by Y/Project Autumn/Winter 2018.

Natasha wears green dress by Y/Project
Autumn/Winter 2019.

Models: Natasha Poly at Women Management, Lorenzo, Redouane. Hair: Laurent Philippon at Bryant Artists. Make-up: Masae Ito at M+A Paris. Casting: Ben Grimes. Nails: Chloé Desmarchelier.
Set design: Nara Lee. Retouching: Meredith Motley. Lighting assistants: Virgile Biechy, Alexandre Sallé de Chou, Yves Mourtada. Digital operator: Henri Coutant. Producers: Lisa Stanbridge and Raine Stephenson at M+A London.
Stylist assistant: Michele Lian, Livia Dominica. Hair assistant: Michael Thanh Bui. Set-design assistant: Ettore Crobu.

Lorenzo wears white jacket, black and blue cut-out jeans, and
loafers by Y/Project Spring/Summer 2019.

Glenn Martens is avoiding burnout by taking on more jobs. That might seem counterintuitive, but Martens, creative director of Diesel and Y/Project, and the latest couture collaborator at Jean Paul Gaultier, is relishing the opportunity to experiment across such disparate brands. And he's doing it well. His most recent collections for Diesel and Jean Paul Gaultier were lauded by fashion critics and have made him one of this year's most talked-about designers.

Born in Bruges, a small, picturesque town in northwest Belgium, fashion design wasn't even on the horizon until, on a study trip to Antwerp, he happened to visit the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. With no portfolio, he applied to its competitive fashion-design programme. He was accepted, but his first couple of years were spent on the verge of failure until, as he describes it, 'something clicked'.

Fast forward to 2013, when Martens was named creative director of Y/Project, after the brand's founder, Yohan Serfaty, had died of cancer. The French designer had established in 2011 Y/Project as a dark and gloomy menswear brand known for sleek, dystopian outerwear, but under Martens' stewardship it has become better known for bold experimentation and unorthodox design, a space for humorous creativity, expert craftsmanship and unpretentious fashion. This change of direction soon caught the attention of the wider industry, earning Martens a reputation as an innovative thinker with fresh ideas among industry peers and fashion-conscious millennials.

This past year, Martens has been balancing that position with two others, an opportunity afforded only to the very best. At Jean Paul Gaultier – the label where Martens secured his first job out of the Royal Academy – he was asked to create the Spring/Summer 2022 haute-couture collection. Presented in January, it was full of gowns corseted with desiccated bands of tulle and chiffon, and was an undeniable success, in part because Gaultier and Martens share a taste for the unconventional. Martens has injected a similarly anarchic spirit into Diesel, where he was named creative director in October 2020. His debut collection, which showed in Milan earlier this year, was full of shredded dresses, frayed denim and feathered jackets, prompting the *New York Times* to dub him 'the first great designer of 2022'.

In other words, Martens is the man of the hour. Following a stellar start to the year, he sat down with *System* to discuss creative experimentation, the role of celebrity in design, and what it means to move between the niche and the mainstream.

Rana Toofanian: How are you?

Glenn Martens: I'm good! Today we're in Venice for the opening of the Tom of Finland Foundation exhibition, *All Together*, which Diesel is supporting. It's beautiful; Durk Dehner[1] is here and it's the very first time this work has come out of LA. The LGBTQ+ art on display is from a time when being gay was illegal and all the art pieces are super small because they were doing them in secret. Tom and Durk really changed the perception [of queer communities] for the world; it's thanks to their activism that people like me can live a life of freedom in Paris, New York and Milan. It is quite emotional. We're opening the exhibition tonight; it will be a lovely moment.

A brand like Diesel comes with a huge platform. How do you think about your position and the power it holds?

When you are creative director of a brand like Diesel, which talks to everyone, not just those who can afford luxury, you really have a voice. With that comes responsibility to help build a better future; we can give a platform to game changers like Tom of Finland.

What access to and awareness of fashion did you have growing up in Bruges?

Bruges is a very cute provincial town; it's known as a sleeping beauty. It used to be a metropolis in the Middle Ages – the equivalent of a Manhattan – but after an economic crisis, Bruges the metropolis died. Today, it has this amazing Gothic architecture and not much else. I was raised in a very traditional family – on my mother's side, they are all strict military people – so growing up, I wasn't aware of what was happening in contemporary culture. I lived in this fairy tale of Gothic churches and buildings. Clothes were markers of social status in high school, not creative statements. Back then, the cool kids had Diesel clothes or an O'Neill jacket. I was a bit of a geek, to be honest; I thought I would become an archaeologist or an Egyptologist. My dad is passionate about history, which meant going to museums, castles and palaces to see historical or classical art; he would talk about the art and create stories about every single painting. I became obsessed by certain historical figures, and I would draw all the time. My first connection to fashion came from drawing Marie Antoinette, Caesar and Napoleon. I didn't know how they looked; it was their costumes that made them wh they are remembered as. I discovered that clothes could create personalities, that clothes have social power. I started to become aware of fashion, not as a craft, but as something to study.

How did that take you to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, applying to do a fashion degree?

It was a bit of a happy coincidence. I studied Latin and languages in a Catholic college, but when I was 18, I realized I wasn't made to study Classics at university. I was hyperactive, and I thought something artistic might suit me better, but I didn't know what, so I went into interior design. The course took me on a trip to Antwerp, and I think that was the year the Royal Academy's fashion department had just reopened. The building had been renovated by a very famous Belgian architect, so naturally we had to visit it.[2] I remember thinking it was a gorgeous place in which to spend part of my life, so when I graduated from interior design, I was like, OK, let's try to do something else. I was 21 and I didn't really think it through. At the entrance exams, I suddenly realized the reputation of the course: there are about 400 kids trying to get in every year, and the Academy only accepts 80. My portfolio consisted of chairs and kitchens – nothing to do with fashion – but I was accepted. So I jumped in, very unprepared. It was a culture shock, totally eye-opening. For the first two years I was on the verge of failing all the time, but then something clicked and, somehow, I managed to work it out.

You were the underdog back then.

During the four years you are studying, there is a lot of pressure because most people in the class ultimately fail. Just 14 of us graduated in my year, and that was a big year; normally, there are only 8 – from 80 to 8. The teachers never tell you what to do, they just say 'do it again'. That provokes constant introspection: why, why, why? They force you to question yourself all the time until you understand who you are and where you want to be. In a way, it is a school focused on forming creative directors. But it worked out and it was a really beautiful time. The Academy is great; everybody is so flamboyant and eccentric. It's like being in a film every day. You work your ass off, which is good preparation for when you enter the industry! Yet everything was a cloud of happiness, joy and extravaganza.

How did you end up working for Jean Paul Gaultier after graduating?

It was another lucky coincidence. There was a magazine titled *Encens* and its editor-in-chief, Samuel Drira, was on a jury at the Academy. He thought my work was really great and he connected me to the head designer of the men's department and the women's pre-collection, who in those days was Gilles Rosier.[3] I was given a job straight away. It was very junior – I was the assistant of the assistant – but that's how I ended up in Paris with a salary and a 10m² studio apartment. It was lucky I had a job because my parents would never have been able to afford to finance me doing an internship abroad. In those days, Gaultier was not the brand I had been dreaming of; I was drawn to Nicolas Ghesquière, Balenciaga, and Phoebe Philo. Then I arrive, and I see the heritage of the house and how Jean Paul works. It was an amazing start to my career.

Gaultier is a well-known inventor and a disruptor. How important are originality and invention to you?

My way of speaking is experimentation; it's about finding new things, and I think Jean Paul also has that. He was the first person to really work on street casting. He was one of the first people to bring streetwear to elevated garments, denim to luxury. Once you understand what he did and how he opened the doors for other designers, then you can only respect and look up to him.

You touched earlier on the idea of creating clothes as a means of self-expression and communicating ideas. You are often described as a 'conceptual designer', like Rei Kawakubo or Hussein Chalayan. How do you feel about that label? And, more broadly, what do you feel the function of fashion is?

Those are two different questions. I am definitely a conceptual designer. I have to have a concept; the silhouettes and the garments come afterwards,

'Clothes were markers of social status in my high school, not creative statements. Back then, the cool kids had Diesel clothes or an O'Neill jacket.'

'I was given a job straight away at Gaultier. I was the assistant of the assistant, but that's how I ended up in Paris with a salary and a 10m² apartment.'

which is quite a Belgian way of thinking. Even Dries Van Noten, who is more focused on beauty and colours, has said that his colourways come from a concept, and then he develops the prints and graphics. To your second question, I think fashion is about making people feel strong about who they are and how they want to be perceived. Clothes carry power, which is why fashion is so exciting. The great thing about fashion is that it has many different purposes depending on your market, depending on the brand you are designing for.

You are in the position of being one of the few people who designs for multiple brands. You have a big workload, multiplied by three. Which part of being a designer do you enjoy the most?
I am very blessed to work in an industry that is also my passion, where I don't actually feel that work is work. I wish more people could live like that. When you are younger, you are hungry to express yourself; you really want to scream out very loud. I don't have that need any more; I think I have screamed loud enough that people respect me for my creativity. Now I feel extremely pleased when I see somebody having a lovely day in a basic, sustainable Diesel denim. It is beautiful to think that they are living their life, walking around the Venice Biennale or wherever, and this brand is part of it. And I am even more proud because it is sustainable. When you are a director and you work with different teams, you also become a bit of a psychologist; it's great to see people grow. Honestly, there is not one moment that I truly loathe what I do.

Being at the helm of a brand like Diesel comes with a lot of media responsibilities and attention. There's also a lot of pressure on designers now to exist as personalities and be visible. Jean Paul Gaultier mastered this.
To be honest, I work so much that I don't have any spare time to be a celebrity, but if it happens, then, cool. I was in SoHo in New York earlier this year and maybe four or five times, people stopped me in the street. Of course, it is satisfying that people love your work and are interested in who you are and what you do, but I try to be outside of cities as much as possible in my free time. I need my nature walks, I need to visit castles and churches, because my brain needs to shut off to refresh.

What other things did you learn from being around Gaultier?
The most important thing that I learned from Jean Paul is the value of enjoying things outside work. Jean Paul Gaultier enjoys life so much; he is like the French cliché of joie de vivre. Every day was fun with him, and you felt that in the company, too. A lot of people I knew did internships in other Parisian houses and the pressure was unbearable, the culture was toxic, as it can be in fashion. Gaultier taught me: why would I ever go into such an intense industry if I cannot make it fun for me and the people I work with? I have to be a bit bossier now as a creative director, but it is not a toxic environment. I cannot operate any other way.

Some could say you have moved from being niche, beloved and celebrated by industry insiders for your work at Y/Project to being in the mainstream cultural consciousness at Diesel, with a brand that has massive reach.
Y/Project was really about embracing uniqueness; it was not about classic beauty or the hype of streetwear, which was intense when I first started building up Y/Project. Huge brands were copying the identities of other brands, and no one seemed to care. It was connected to social media, when everyone started consuming visuals and became lazier and less willing to dig into things. I really wanted to push what I believed fashion was and what I wanted it to be. Because of that, a lot of the collections I brought onto the runway were maybe difficult for outsiders to digest. I really wanted to reflect on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, on how we can do things differently. That made Y/Project more niche and it is still like that, except finally, people understand that this is the point of the brand. We are not the opposite of streetwear or logomania; we just want to celebrate independence. I have noticed a lot of people saying this, and that's something I am actually very proud of. Rick Owens and Margiela each has his own language. Nicolas Ghesquière, Phoebe Philo, Raf Simons, Dries Van Noten: they have their own languages and they are all designers who I really respect, regardless of their aesthetic. I am not saying that I am as good as them, just that I am proud that we have managed to establish our unique identity in this saturated industry. That doesn't mean that I can't do other things. I focused on beautiful silhouettes with Jean Paul Gaultier, for example, while the focus for Diesel is more social; it's about being part of people's everyday lives. Putting a logo sweatshirt on Y/Project's catwalk would have been like selling my soul, but I can do that at Diesel: create great sweaters with great logos and sell them at a democratic price, in a way that respects the customer and the industry and the environment. It is very important to be connected to the brand you are working for, to understand why it is there and not to get bullied into doing other things.

'Putting logo sweatshirts on Y/Project's catwalk would have been like selling my soul, but I can do that at Diesel and sell them at a democratic price.'

In order to stay afloat,many brands extend themselves into other categories that aren't necessarily them. Logomania was already a part of the Diesel identity, so I suppose you can approach it there with a fresh perspective.
People want to wear a sweater with a Diesel logo on it. The people I talk to are not always obsessed by fashion; they are more interested in the environment and looking great. I have done logos at Y/Project, but it was never just a logo, it was a whole concept, a whole graphic identity with crazy, distressed embroideries. I have belts with the Y/Project logo on them where the Y is the buckle. There is always a concept behind it. At Diesel, the basic logo jerseys will, starting in June, all be made from organic cotton, including the prints and inside the stores we will have QR codes explaining the sustainability approach behind each garment. I would never just make a sweater with a logo; there needs to be something more and that is where the power of Diesel lies: in diffusing these messages about sustainability and raising awareness of these issues.

You've mentioned how important sustainability is at Diesel. Does being at a big brand allow you to test techniques you can then apply elsewhere?
Y/Project is always the most experimental. It is where I test things and *then* I might bring them to Diesel.

It's the other way around, then?
That's how I've done it. It's not so easy to have a sustainable approach with big brands because of the price point. The moment you use organic or certified cotton and incorporate different treatments to your denims, it becomes more expensive. It's very difficult to make people worldwide – the millions of customers we have – understand that the same quality of denim that they bought two years ago suddenly went up in price by €20. Since the 1990s, we have all been raised to buy €10 T-shirts from big mainstream brands, and you can still buy a sweatshirt for €15, but there is no way that there is no blood attached to it. There is always blood attached to something so cheap. Imagine the process: growing and picking the cotton, dyeing it, stitching it – there are so many steps before the sweatshirt is sold for €15. But we have been raised to think it's OK. I don't have that issue with Y/Project because it is a luxury brand, so customers won't complain about paying €20 more. What I do at Y/Project is insist on certain ideas; every season, we've tried to reinvent the brand. During confinement, for example, we developed the Evergreen line, which is not allowed to go into sales or be out of stock; a big part of Y/Project's turnover is based on those pieces. They are all quite experimental, but they have a bigger audience just because we insist on them. The Evergreen project at Y/Project prepared me to experiment with the Denim Library and the essential jerseys upon my arrival at Diesel – they also can never go into sales – and now that works really well.

You sound really happy. But it has been a weird, and I imagine quite stressful, two years, especially if you are working across multiple businesses. Are you feeling optimistic about the future?
I don't feel optimistic about the future, in a global sense. My grandfather turned 98 on 9 April 2022. He spent the first years of his adult life in the trenches fighting the Nazis and saw his best friends die. Now, he turns on the television and sees the same sort of war happening in Europe. It is disgusting. Humanity has this fantastic power to forget. That's also why I insisted on this exhibition for Tom of Finland. Activists and artists fought so hard to make life possible for people like me, a gay man in Europe, and I really live my life to the fullest thanks to those who fought and were persecuted. I am sure this will be lost again, and that is why I am not optimistic. Though personally, and in terms of my work, I am quite optimistic, because I have an amazing team. Also, Y/Project, Diesel and Jean Paul Gaultier are all alternatives within the industry, all independent and unique. In Paris, I am loved because I don't think other designers feel that I am competing with them. In that way, I am very blessed. All three companies are quite ironic and don't take themselves too seriously; they are all based on celebration – which is a nice way to live.

1. Durk Dehner is a Canadian-born publisher, filmmaker and president of the Tom of Finland Foundation. In 1976, a 20-something Dehner saw a poster by Tom of Finland in a Manhattan motorbike bar. He wrote to the older artist – real name, Tuoko Laaksonen – the two met and lived as a couple until Tom's death in 1991 aged 71.

2. MoMu's 1999 renovation was overseen by architect Marie-José Van Hee. Born near Ghent, Belgium, she has made Flanders the focus of her work for over 50 years. She is one of of five Flemish architects – sometimes called the *silencieux* – who studied at the Sint-Lucas architecture school in the mid-1970s and who focused on local, practical projects, rather than utopian grand plans.

3. Gilles Rosier is a Paris-based creative director who has worked at Balmain, Dior, Jean Paul Gaultier, Lacoste and Kenzo, where he was artistic director for four years. The supervisor of the clothing design Master's at the École nationale des Arts décoratifs in Paris, he launched Éternel Parisien, a leather-goods brand, in 2020.

‘Saying I’m a fashion designer is not enough any more.’

At London’s Royal College of Art, the fiercely progressive Fashion MA programme goes far beyond the ‘graduate collection’.

Interview by Jorinde Croese
Photographs by Oliver Truelove

In between the Royal Albert Hall, a handful of embassies, the V&A and the Natural History Museum is a hotbed of radical conceptual thinking: the Royal College of Art. It is housed in a striking 1962 Modernist building that sits unexpectedly among these London landmarks and feels almost like a strategic move to draw creative reactions from generations of thinkers and makers. Founded in 1832 as the Government School of Design, it was renamed the RCA in 1896 and has since trained a who's who of British creativity, from artists including Barbara Hepworth, Ian Dury, Bridget Riley, Ridley Scott, David Hockney, and Tracey Emin, to fashion designers such as Zandra Rhodes and Ossie Clark, and more recently, Erdem Moralioglu, Bianca Saunders, and Supriya Lele.

Today, the RCA continues to offer a wide range of courses – from intelligent mobility to environmental architecture, curation to creative leadership, jewellery design to digital direction – and prides itself on a multidisciplinary and dedicated approach to conceptual and radical thinking. This ethos is perfectly embodied in the Fashion MA, in large part thanks to Zowie Broach, its gregarious and freethinking director since 2014. The co-founder of avant-garde design studio and brand Boudicca in 1997, she encourages her students to transcend the conventions of the 'graduate collection', pushing them to question their own identity, values, and aesthetic choices on a deeper level. The result is that fashion at the RCA today is no longer solely about clothes, but instead a far-reaching and holistic investigation of the meaning of creativity itself.

Zowie Broach is a force of nature. Eight years as head of the MA fashion programme at the Royal College of Art have done nothing to dim her energy, still as high as when I first interviewed her about the role in 2014. Intellectually sharp and conceptually deep, she has a profound empathy and care for her students, whom she treats like family, but isn't afraid to challenge. In her role, Broach is able to draw on her own design story – she co-founded avant-garde design studio Boudicca, with Brian Kirkby in 1997 – while keeping her eye firmly on both present and future. This brings a relevance to the curriculum and avoids it getting stuck in a 'this is what we've always done' mentality. As an educator, Broach embraces fluidity of gender and identity, the merging of the physical and the digital, and bringing together different fields within the RCA to create new futures and thought processes that go beyond the usual graduate collections or fashion practices. You can feel this tangibly in the end-of-programme shows, which often feel engaging and immersive, prompting engagement with the ideas behind the clothes. Broach and I sat down on a white leather sofa, tucked away in a corner of the RCA's fashion studios, and began our discussion about finding the right tools to instigate profoundly radical change, and how, as Broach says, 'no one wants disruption until *they* are ready for it'.

Jorinde Croese: While change can feel necessary, it's still not happening at the speed we need today.

Zowie Broach: Yes, it is interesting to think about our relationship with the planet. Nature changes constantly and does it very well. It's about life and death, survival and community and connectivity. Maybe it's about us becoming closer, understanding and thinking about agriculture and locality. One of the things I struggle with is understanding the scale of the MA that I look after. I did a talk at the Parsons MA [in New York] and there were maybe eight or nine students. I was just like, 'Wow, I have nearly 130-150 students! I must be running the only fashion MA course in the world that has this many people!' When you interviewed me when I first arrived at the RCA we probably had 50 students across the 2 years who were split into year groups and branched into other colleges, where they then might have been broken down into even smaller groups. Then we merged all of that in October 2015 when we moved downstairs in the building. That was important.

So the different courses, menswear, womenswear and footwear, all merged?

Yes. When I first arrived, there was this whole early debate around gender that had come out of America. You realized even then that there was this shift beginning to open up around identity. In the times we are in, you cannot just be binary. When we moved downstairs, we started doing these talks at the beginning of the year to bring in all these different practices and disciplines. We started bio-digital platforms and systems that allowed people to have a practice while also exploring new perspectives relevant to the time we're living in. It's not just fashion school or finishing an MA that takes you into the industry; there are all these other disciplines and ways of thinking. For me, with where I come from, it was never going to be about being traditional, and I'm very proud of how we are the only programme in the whole college that allows students to title their practice. Sometimes they are traditional, and sometimes they are more out there testing the waters, because language is so limiting, in a way. Take the word 'fashion' or 'modern': all these words have been overused and are removed from a position of where they have truth. Saying 'I'm a fashion designer' is not enough any more for most people; they need to use different words and describe it in different ways. That's important for me and that comes back to their individual practice and agency. It's about their understanding of self and not being part of what exists but of where we're going to be led by them going forward. That means they have to have an independent vision and articulation.

'It's not just fashion school or finishing an MA that takes you into the industry; there are now all these other disciplines and ways of thinking.

Can you give me an example of what people have called their practice?

A student from last year called herself a 'bio-activist designer'. She made clothes and used bio material, but activism was also very important to her. She was also really into questioning the relationship between us, the material of nature, and our choices. And then we have had other people, like a student from two or three years back who joined Extinction Rebellion and activism became her MA. Other people are using bio in their practice, but they might not have chosen a title.

What differentiates this MA programme from other schools'?
I can't do a comparison because I don't know the other schools well enough. What matters most to me is whether students at the end of their time here understand themselves. That's the most important thing you can offer someone – and it's so simple and yet so complex. It's about finding a complete language and elegant, graceful confidence. The industry is noisy and confusing, and you can have a good product, but if you don't understand your core identity and why you make choices, things that might seem the right thing to do later turn out to be the wrong call. The students make and design and there are lots of practicalities, but the essence – and what I am most interested in – is about them understanding themselves and being able to articulate change. This idea of change is really important. I want them to make change, to lead change. They are the creative leaders of our future and that becomes really empowering for them. That gives you more of a sense of purpose.

How do you get people to dig deep and find that?
I run a funny project called 'Mirror Mirror'; it's the *only* thing I run actually. Bizarrely I wrote it for Shelley Fox [Parsons MA fashion director] who, before she started at Parsons, was given a period of time to work out what the MA would be. The three or four years before I did this job, I would go to New York and run that project there. We start it on a Monday and on the Friday morning you present. It's not about design; it's about asking the students who they are. It's hard to explain in practical terms why it works; there are no rules about what they should or shouldn't do, but what is important is that it's very fast and intuitive. I ask the students to be very focused that week, not do other projects or make appointments, and as much as you love your family or your partner or friends, they are out that week. I want them to examine their choices in life.

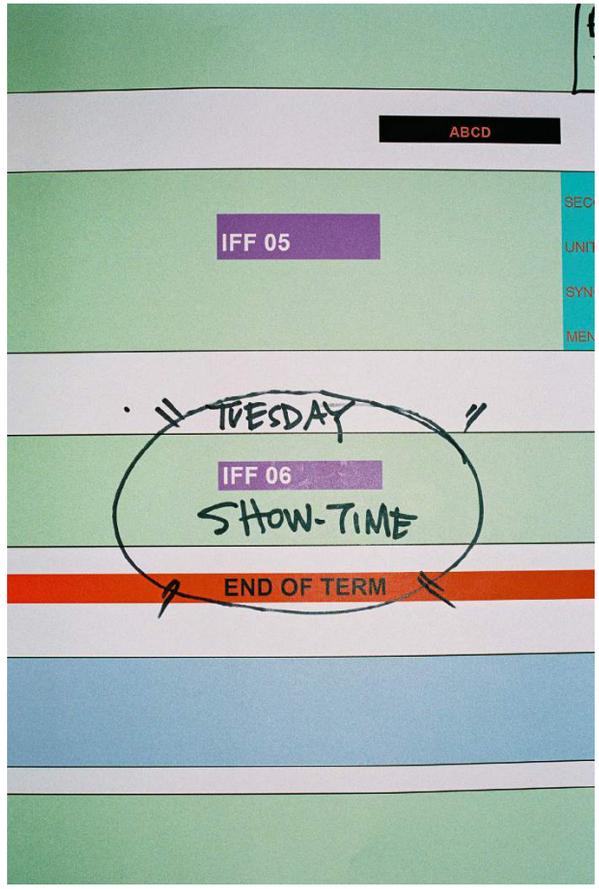
Is that difficult?
It is difficult for all of us to understand who we are; it's a massively complex question. Whether it is the music you listen to, the books you read, whether you are young or old – you are surrounded by choices. Why do you make them? Do you make them consciously or are you just doing it without thinking? The really great designers understand everything they do. That is the line of your body, your voice, your language. When I say designers, they could be artists, creatives, from a dancer to a writer, the people who we admire are masters; they are so dedicated and focused. It's not pretentious, it's really beautiful, and a real passion for wanting to constantly learn. Some people do it effortlessly; for others it takes them their whole lives. It's not like you need to know who you are after five days, but just thinking about those questions begins to stir something. It's about trying to understand: when you sit at a table, how do you sit, where do you sit, which table do you choose, which chair? I always use a very simple example: if Margiela and Fendi had to present themselves by only using a piece of paper and a pencil, you would know immediately who they are. That's about understanding those elements of your identity.

Has anything changed in the years since you first created 'Mirror Mirror'?
No, it is bizarrely really simple and really complicated. Some people don't engage and then they miss out because then they struggle more; that's what I see. It is about letting go and that's hard for people.

Did you ever go through the 'Mirror Mirror' process yourself? If so, did it make you realize what was important to teach?
Retrospectively, I can see that there have been things that have defined me. I didn't do an MA, and I wasn't actually doing fashion; I was doing video direction and styling. I used to watch a lot of films and there was this amazing video store in Notting Hill, and over one weekend I watched every Almodóvar film. That was the first time I realized that someone's language could be the same but different. I studied his work and enjoyed it, but then I realized something about his choices of different characters and the overarching questions that he was asking.

It does seem that a lot of students today have a planned trajectory, where they envision doing an MA after their BA. Have you noticed that change in the past two decades?
You used to be like the crème de la crème if you did an MA because there were so few courses. On one hand you

'We have had a student from two or three years back who joined Extinction Rebellion and activism subsequently became her Fashion MA.'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could call it the commodification of education. On the other, you could say that it's actually no different to being an architect or a lawyer, you need that time to define who you are. Maybe it's a positive because understanding those early, mysterious stages of a practice can't really be done in three years – and you don't complete it after an MA either. It was also the democracy of education, it has become more available. I was on a BA with only 13 people in my year. There are some really phenomenal BAs where people are ready to go into industry afterwards, so it depends on the choices, and education is really important for some families and some cultures. Other people can go straight to industry and learn there.

Would you say that the majority of the people here want to start their own thing?

I think they would all love to; that is an instinct for sure. When you're in it, you can't think about other elements because you are here to craft your world, so I would say it's a natural response. Then when you leave you have to return to the atmosphere of reality. Then it comes down to the essentialness of what an individual needs and whether they have the luxury of financial support or whether they have to get a job. There are so many different scenarios. Then I think that doesn't stop people from doing their own thing and then going into industry; there are multiple variables. We see in China more and more people are starting their own labels; there's a massive shift and that excites me. Same in Korea. Whereas London has had bucketloads of young designers forever, so maybe it's now harder in this country. What is also interesting, and thanks to Covid this became even clearer, is that you don't have to be based in London any more. I think it is also about people understanding time. Many actually need two or three years before they can say, 'Yes, I'm doing my label.' They do other things, they meet people, they think about it…

What draws people here and to what you have created?

I would like to think they have seen people who have been here and what they see coming out of the college and have been impressed. Although we offer students a lot and there are lots of great people around the course, it is also about exchange and response. The response from the students is as much a part of the programme as the programme itself, and it is that interweaving that then delivers. I think that is different from other colleges. The other thing is that the college isn't a fashion school; it has all these other disciplines. For some people it has a classic reputation and it is based in London; that all ticks some boxes. I would love to think that maybe others have noticed that it isn't so traditional, that there was this freedom to explore, and they align to that.

You mention that 'Mirror Mirror' is the only thing you teach. What is your overarching role? Is it shaping the curriculum, updating it, looking at new staff to hire?

It's very practical most of the time: keeping to deadlines, making sure that information is shared, putting out fires, dealing with complexities, being intuitive about where things are breaking or where things are growing, which has all been hard in Covid.

Because you are less there with the people?

At the beginning of Covid it was easy because everyone was in the same boat, but then it became so in and out, and changing constantly, and those variables are so hard to control. For me it's very important to try and keep people grounded and positive in their attitude. If things are not right, we have to discuss it and do so in an elegant way; our lives are too intense and complex, and we've got to find a way of being. We all remember that first intense couple of months of lockdown and I really started to do a lot of yoga and meditation at that point. I had an amazing student, Natalia, and that was very much part of her practice, so I asked whether she would run a meditation course every Monday, which she did throughout her whole final year. I think once again this comes back to the idea of trying to work out size and scale and how I feel about that.

Would you like to reduce the size of the student body?

It is not my choice, but actually we quite like the idea that it's sticky and difficult because that's what the world is. Some people have the luxury to be in much smaller scenarios with very few people, but mostly you're going to have to

'If Margiela or Fendi had to present themselves by only using a piece of paper and a pencil, you would know immediately who they are.'

deal with the complexity of size, whether you go to work at a big fashion house, FarFetch, or a big-tech gaming company. There are lots of scenarios you can go into where there are lots of people. Everyone is dealing with however many emails, texts, Instas, Signals – that's the level of interaction we're all dealing with now. It's complex, especially when compared to the early 1990s when you'd just go home and listen to your answer-machine messages. I've thought about this idea of being in a community that is complex and difficult with lots of different international cultures and nationalities, but it can also be more local; being from Birmingham compared to Wales can be as complex as Angola compared to Shanghai. There is something soothing and very beautiful in that complexity – it's just about how we handle it. It's not all positive and there are going to be difficult times, but it makes me question and think about the whole scenario, rather than just numbers. You have to think about it creatively. There are loads of businesses of 150 people, so how do you manage that and what is the atmosphere that you want to have?

I imagine that you have chosen a strong team around you to create this culture and atmosphere.
We have these amazing mentors and my staff who also mentor. We've started to call it 'mentor' and not 'tutor' because it is different with an MA; it's more about dialogue and support rather than teaching. They choose to be here. It is like this beautiful, creative, philosophical dialogue that can be very practical, as well as very opening and demanding.

Do you get time to do your own thing?
I'm meant to do that. I am really trying to focus on the digital. The expression of self in the digital is going to be one of the most beautiful places we can exist in, as long as we get it right. At the moment I'm reminded of the point I was at like 20 years ago when we were protesting and everyone else was like, 'What are you talking about?' because they were happy to move into capitalism. Where we are now in terms of the digital and the real, and that collision, is crucial and we have a great responsibility as creatives to understand how to make the right decisions. That fashion identity, the designing of self, is going to be a huge part of that. It's not just fashion and products – it's us. And that comes back to the one simple question: who are you?

‘Digital technology and craftsmanship are not polar opposites. Fashion can exist in several realms and can be so much more than just a wearable-collection artefact.’

Maria Nava, 28

Tell us about your collection.
Spectral Objects is a provocative piece focused on the romanticized idea of a ghost in science. The project comments on our identities and how we become ourselves. We are more than a passport and the place where we were born. We are also the places where we have lived; we are the people we have met. We are experiences, conversations and interactions. A ghost is an infinite memory, and we are the product of memories.

What were your stylistic ambitions and references? What did you want to communicate through your collection?
The purpose of this project is not to provide an answer, but to create a unique, interactive world for anyone and everyone to come in and discover the connection between memories and identity. It’s an investigation into how touch triggers motion, which then provokes different emotional behaviours. The skin is the largest organ in the human body and acts as our first point of contact with the outside world. *Spectral Objects* proposes the idea of skin as a recording machine. How can memories of sound and touch be preserved in a kinetic artefact? How can memories shape the motion of this artefact? What happens when these artefacts interact through touch, not only with our bodies, but also with an external environment?

What’s the best thing about the Royal College of Art’s MA fashion programme?
The conversations, feedback and problem-solving bounce-back with tutors, heads of programmes, technicians and other students.

Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
More than a single person, I admire designers and artists who constantly challenge pre-established ideals of what fashion can be.

What can younger designers express through fashion that designers from an older generation cannot?
Digital technology and craftsmanship are not polar opposites. Fashion can exist in several realms and can be so much more than just a wearable-collection artefact. It can have a strong aesthetic and at the same time be intelligent, in terms of both manufacturing methods and performance. It can trigger conversations and modify human behaviour; incorporate smart materials that allow these wearable artefacts to learn from different environments; capture human memories and preserve them in a digital archive. Fashion can be anything we want it to be.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
I would see myself developing a multidisciplinary studio or start-up focused on costume and character-design projects for theatre, performance and film, which would blend robotics, AI and fashion.

‘I used masks as a medium to convey my imagination of future identities; then I presented it to the audience in the purely digital form of a game. The future is virtual, but identities are becoming more concrete in it.’

Mo Nan, 25

Tell us about your collection.
My work begins with imagining the future human and the forms that identity will take in the future. I refer to a lot of Donna Haraway’s ideas. We already have cyborgs, with various prostheses acting as extensions of the physical body. For me, the virtual world is another extension of our mind and identity. I started from my fashion background and used masks as a medium to convey my imagination of future identities; then I presented it to the audience in the purely digital form of the game. The future is virtual, but identities are becoming more concrete in it. I want to explore the gap between the digital world and fashion in my future work.

What’s the best thing about the Royal College of Art’s MA fashion programme?
This place gives me the energy to broaden the boundaries of my own work, and the ability to think critically. My tutor always encourages me to find my own voice in fashion instead of limiting it, and my classmates are so talented; they are constantly updating my definition and view of fashion.

Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
Leigh Bowery. His work and who he was led me to the rift between real world, myth, and identity beyond the constraints of the flesh.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
I hope I will still be creating how I do now.

‘My design aesthetic explores the idea of craft in shoemaking, led by sustainable methodologies that explore materiality and construction.’

Reiss Dendie (RHHH STUDIOS), 36

Tell us about your collection.
My design aesthetic explores the idea of craft in shoemaking, led by sustainable methodologies that explore materiality and construction. It’s often informed by advanced technological practices, but that aspect intentionally may not be apparent as I seek to employ crude, domestic interpretations of the systems that inspire me. This approach is influenced by my perceived social class, ethnicity, and lack of access as a pupil within a state-funded educational system. I believe my aesthetic to be performative and esoteric within the context of how my work responds to a lived experience.

The best thing about the Royal College of Art’s MA fashion programme?
The diverse creative community of minds you have the opportunity of meeting and potentially collaborating with, across many disciplines. These constant interactions of sharing ideas and perspective for me can be highly motivating and allow me to focus on achieving what might have felt unimaginable, speculative, or unattainable at one point.

What can younger designers express through fashion that designers from an older generation cannot?
Designers of this modern contemporary time are able to engage with technologies in ways that allow them to respond to a world of both global and domestic concerns. They can challenge social political views to help shape a more progressive humanist world, and are capable of demonstrating and taking the lead in decentralising systems that have failed not only fashion, but also the global manufacturing industry.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
I plan to be in a position where I am capable of providing opportunities or access to resources to the next aspiring creative generation from local and global communities.

‘I believe in the future of the body; its requirements will become part of the design process for many of the products we use.’

Sid Bullmore, 25

Tell us about your collection.
At the RCA I have focused on applying generative design to clothing, relating our anatomy and motion directly to the garments we wear. I wanted to communicate my vision for integrating computational design into clothing to provide a real-world, scalable system to personalize garment design. I believe in the future of the body; its requirements will become part of the design process for many of the products we use. Though my graduate work has focused on clothing, similar technology could be applied to furniture, architecture or food. It’s less about fashion and more about human-centric design: how we collect biometric information and the computational models we use to process that information into better products. It was important to me that the project did not use typical fashion references. The pieces’ appearance was dictated by the simplest, most effective solution to each technical problem. I found balancing these requirements led to a more meaningful aesthetic.

What’s the best thing about the Royal College of Art’s MA fashion programme?
The RCA is the only university that allows students on a fashion MA to push clothing or fashion beyond what might be seen on a runway. There’s such a breadth of interest across our cohort; we can spend a term exploring something completely outside our field and then another term working out how it combines with what we knew before. This has been the best way to grow as a designer over my two years at the RCA.

What can younger designers express through fashion that designers from an older generation cannot?
A key advantage for young designers is that we are more technologically able than older generations. It’s empowering to experience how new digital skills can expand what we are able to design and make.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
I hope that clothing design in the future will be seen as an extension of healthcare and design for well-being. I want to be involved in the development of technology and manufacturing that facilitate this shift. I’m excited by the recent growth of the sportswear industry; it is indicative of peoples’ attitudes to the current fashion industry and what they want or expect from their garments. Working in this area is a good place to start, but I hope over the next five years I can be part of developing products that can be worn less as specific performance pieces and more as material technology that adds real value to our lives.

‘The work began when I saw a father teach his son how to fly a kite. The simplicity of that act made me consider the dynamics of father-and-son relationships within society.’

Shanti Bell, 25

Tell us about your collection.
The body of work I am currently creating began when I saw a father teach his son how to fly a kite on a beach. The simplicity of that act made me consider the dynamics of father-and-son relationships within society and my own family, and how the pressures of masculinity can warp and alter this relationship. My work looks to describe visually the emotions felt by the son and express a moment when he is heard through the format of sculpture, set design, sound, performance, and menswear. Visually, the piece will be a balance of minimalism and art, referencing choreography and sound: a sculpture exhibition meets a music jam. Through delicately establishing the effects of an absent father in conjunction with celebrating the free nature of the son, I’m looking to create a moment of conflicting honesty.

What’s the best thing about the Royal College of Art’s MA fashion programme?
The RCA not only accepts, but actually welcomes interdisciplinary practices. As a multidisciplinary creative myself, I have found that using other mediums to express ideas is encouraged: entering the wood or metal workshop as a fashion student is greeted with intrigue and excitement as opposed to surprise, which is really great. Also, I find the tutors actively get students to dig deep conceptually to find the authenticity within an idea.

Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
It is hard to restrict it to simply one person, however, a creative who I have highly admired for many years is Yoann Bourgeois. A dancer, performance artist, and choreographer whose performance pieces have entered the space of fashion, he most recently directed and choreographed the Louis Vuitton Autumn/Winter 2022 show. Bourgeois’ method of engaging the body within set design and his themes of challenging the boundaries of gravity offers a completely fresh and fearless approach to fashion. His work shows how different mediums and forms of creativity can be relevant to fashion, and intertwine and overlap within it.

What can younger designers express through fashion that designers from an older generation cannot?
Creatives are not defined by their generation, but by their willingness to be open. New designers approaching fashion within the current social climate have a renewed consideration for the work they produce and its impact. A more conscious approach is being applied where designers are observing and visually commenting on the outside world, which is crucial to creating work that is a reflection of the living. All new designers, myself included, are challenging things that may appear decided and known, and in turn, are offering opportunities for innovation and a shift.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
Alongside further learning and expanding my expression in sculpture, set design, performance, furniture and menswear, I would love to be collaborating with creatives from all walks of life and parts of the world, and within different practices. I am interested in creating work that speaks about masculinity from a female perspective, but I’d like to look at how that could be reflected differently by collaborating with others, for example, a glassblower, a group of dancers, or a lighting designer. I always strive to allow the concept to define the creative output so as to ensure authentic expression, and I will endeavour to keep that present within my future work.

‘Since losing my hearing in 2010 my memory of sound is fading more every day, making it a somewhat abstract concept. My work, *Multisensory Bodies*, explores ways how one (and I) can experience sound without hearing.’

Sebastian Röck, 30

Tell us about your collection.
Since losing my hearing in 2010 my memory of sound is fading more and more every day, making it a somewhat abstract concept. When the surrounding world is quiet, it can be very difficult to feel connected with or even grounded within it, partly because our brain is made to link sound directly to our emotional experiences. My work, *Multisensory Bodies*, explores ways how one (and I) can experience sound without hearing. In order to achieve this I am developing different experiences that translate sound into other stimuli. The first experience I created is a visual translation of sound: three-dimensional digital sculptures created from sound, based on an algorithm that uses pitch, volume, timbre, and other aspects of noise. While they don’t enable you to understand the sound, they are the first step to reaching a translation of sound’s emotional layer. The second part is a garment that translates sound information into tactile experiences on the body. All previous projects in this field focused on practical aspects like being alert to traffic noises or doorbells, and used vibrating motors to achieve this. While this might be valid, most deaf people don’t really need help to navigate safely through traffic or be alert to their doorbell, we’ve got that covered. In my personal experience and supported by scientific research, the emotional sphere of sound is more important.

What’s the best thing about the Royal College of Art’s MA fashion programme?
The RCA provides us with a space to think beyond our learned truths of what fashion is and what designers are supposed to do. In a world that doesn’t need more of anything, what is the role of the designer? How can we be relevant in a changing environment? Studying here has been a truly transformative experience by encouraging me to think bigger and differently. The tutors and the cohort have helped me to free myself of the restraints and expectations of an industry that is afraid of change.

Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
This is a particularly hard question to answer, but I admire the work of Ellen Fowles, whose work has the potential to have a positive impact on the lives of so many people by implementing small, but really intelligent changes that make clothing more inclusive. Another person to mention here is Anne Ferial. I find her work utilizing her experience as a stroke survivor to develop innovative new therapeutic systems truly mind-blowing.

What can younger designers express through fashion that designers from an older generation cannot?
Fashion is an interesting place to be right now. While everyone who is part of it knows that we are at the beginning of fundamental change, the majority of players have decided to ignore that fact. The vanishing boundaries between the physical and digital and the coming of age of new technologies give us the opportunity to facilitate real change and make truly innovative things, although they might not fit the traditional idea of fashion.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
My plan is to continue my research within a PhD programme. The potential of wearable technology for the inclusion of people with disabilities and more broadly, inclusivity in digital worlds has yet to be explored in depth. I hope that my personal experience will be of great value in advancing this.

‘The relationship between man and machine will move from enslavement to coupling.’

Weilin Song, 25

Tell us about your collection.
Co-Dream is a virtual dreamworld created by computer and human together. Imagine a dreamworld built by your consciousness and the machine; imagine your dreams growing in your body.

What are your stylistic ambitions and references?
There are no references. If anything, it is this moment in time that allows me to see and hear and think. Everything that runs through my mission guides me to where I am going to arrive.

What do you want to communicate to the world through your collection?
The purpose of my work is twofold: one is to record dreams, from consciousness to objects, from thinking to seeing. The second is to demonstrate that computers have a new form of cognition, which will have a cultural impact. The relationship between man and machine will move from enslavement to coupling.

Did you have anybody in mind when you envisaged your collection being worn?
Anyone and any object can wear my work. *Co-Dream* contains a new machine-vision cognitive system, and each segment of consciousness produces a unique result. The *Co-Dream* knitting machine is to reconstruct the world with knitting. In its eyes, it’s maybe not humans who should wear the clothes.

What’s the best thing about the Royal College of Art’s MA fashion programme?
Freedom. The space you’re in, the time you’re given, the people who surround you all contribute to your freedom to explore yourself and the world.

Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
Hussein Chalayan. Always. He’s always there, never losing his curiosity about the future, self-assured and powerful. Like him, technology is something I can’t leave behind. New, tried, experimented: behind all these is time and risk. Being unchanging is the most precious thing, and I hope I’m still dreaming 50 years from now.

What can younger designers express through fashion that designers from an older generation cannot?
I only represent myself; I don’t represent other young designers. A different generation means that people are exposed to different things at an age when they are keen to experiment, such as the virtual, which can change the way our generation lives and perceives. *Co-Dream* means that fashion is something that everyone can actively create, rather than passively choose.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
Virtual directions: the art of interconnecting the human brain with the computer.

‘I just turn all my hobbies into work.’

Why everyone knows Nigo.

Interview by Fraser Cooke
Photographs by Norbert Schoerner

On 23 January 2022 in Paris, Tomoaki Nagao, better known as Nigo, unveiled his debut collection for Kenzo. Front row at the show was a who's who of musicians and cultural figures, most of whom also collaborated on the designer's recently released album, *I Know NIGO!*, including Kanye West; Tyler, the Creator; Pusha T; A$AP Rocky, and Nigo's long-time business partner, collaborative co-conspirator and muse, Pharrell Williams, who co-produced much of the album. The show they and the rest of the packed audience saw was Nigo's reworked vision for Kenzo, one that remixed his and the house's Japanese heritage with his long-time love of Americana. Hickory-striped overalls; Kenzo-emblazoned varsity jackets; Industrial Revolution-inspired mechanics jackets; hippie-patterned 'flower power' denim: all in a historically appropriate colour-coded homage to the house's late founder, Kenzō Takada. Nigo's other nod to the man who brought Japanese fashion to Paris in the 1960s was the location: the shopping arcade Galerie Vivienne, where Takada opened his first Henri Rousseau-inspired boutique, Jungle Jap, in 1970, which in a serendipitous coincidence was also the year Nigo was born.

In 1993, LVMH paid $80 million for Kenzō Takada's company, which by then included mens-, womens- and childrenswear, as well as perfumes and homeware. That same year, Nigo opened his first store, Nowhere – in an unassuming corner of Harajuku, in partnership with Jun Takahashi of Undercover fame – which launched what would become his multi-hyphenate empire, from A Bathing Ape, Billionaire Boys Club, and Human Made, to a huge catalogue of collaborations. A recent example are collections of clothes and accessories designed with Virgil Abloh for Louis Vuitton, which perfectly encapsulated Nigo's unique eye for blending high and low, Japan and the West, luxury values and hypewear collectability. With that proven track record, Nigo was a natural choice to take on Takada's legacy and company.

For *System*, photographer Norbert Schoerner was given access to Nigo's Tokyo design and archival space, as well as the one-man pottery atelier that's perched on top of his studio, while Nike's senior special projects manager – and leading authority on collab culture – Fraser Cooke sat down with Nigo to discuss the complex and ever-evolving rapport between Western culture and Japanese tradition.

Fraser Cooke: An easy one to start with: when you were growing up in Japan, what were your earliest memories of the fashion or arts scenes, those moments that first got you interested?
Nigo: It was in my first year of junior high school. I liked the Japanese idol group the Checkers.[1] They were a 1980s pop group and part of the whole rockabilly revival here. The thing is, I was as much attracted to their visual style as I was their actual music. They were featured heavily in the Japanese magazine *Olive*, which is like the sister publication of *Popeye* magazine – not actually Popeye's wife in this context. I initially bought the magazine because it featured The Checkers, but then I became increasingly drawn to the magazine's fashion content.

So the band was like a conduit that opened up to other stuff.
Exactly. It was the other articles in the magazine with information about things like *zakkaya* [miscellaneous goods] shops in Tokyo and the kind of items they were selling.

Did you grow up outside of Tokyo?
Yes, in Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture.[2] The *zakkaya* stores in Tokyo were selling interesting stuff and that's what drew me in and captured my attention. It made me want to go discover the city for myself.

Nigo shows Fraser a copy of a magazine from the time and an image of a couple in layered tartan clothing.

The issue looks cool.
It was cooler than it is now; it was experimental.

Yeah, it seems more original somehow. It is quite Comme des Garçons…
This was in the middle of the 'DC' boom in 1984.[3]

That is a good reference point, because the 1980s was a melting pot of creativity in Japan. When you look at fashion, there was Kenzo, Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto. Did you find those designers interesting at the time? I mean, obviously you're at Kenzo now.
There were so many popular brands out there, but the 'character' part of DC kind of disappeared, and lots of popular brands like Persons or Pink House didn't make it overseas. Most people outside of Japan don't know about them as they never made it internationally. Back then, I couldn't afford too much, but I spent a lot of time looking and checking everything out. It's not like now; there was no online. Instead, there were boutiques everywhere, even in small cities, and I'd visit them a lot. I was influenced by the kind of 1950s rocker fashion that the Checkers wore; I loved it. Basically, at that time I was wearing Levi's 501 and Adidas T-shirts, an MA-1 flight jacket, and clothes from Hollywood Ranch Market, you know, *amerikaji* [American casual style] stuff.

That was when hip-hop really started to come through…
It wasn't happening in Japan at that stage. [Run-D.M.C.'s] *Raising Hell* was probably the first big hip-hop album for me. That was probably 1986, 1987…

That makes sense because you are a bit younger than me. When did you first move to Tokyo to live? You went to Bunka Fashion College, right? Some of your contemporaries seemed to be into punk, like Jonio [Jun Takahashi] or Hiroshi [Fujiwara], but I don't get the feeling that the whole punk thing was so strong for you.
I know quite a lot about punk, but the fashion… [he implies he didn't dress like a punk]. I was a regular at [punk club night] London Nite[4], but mostly to support my friends. Something interesting about Tokyo is that people aren't defined or limited by the genre that they're into. So you can be into hip-hop or punk and still mix; it doesn't matter. That's really interesting.

I think that was happening right at the beginning in London and New York. It was definitely a mix of those people.
It is mostly London and New York culture that were the influences, with hip-hop and so on.

I guess a good example from the UK would be Big Audio Dynamite: ex-Clash members, with a sort of hip-hop. That was around 1986, I guess, and that had the same mix.
Wow. Was that as early as 1986? It's weird. That far back in my memory is not very clear.

I heard that you were studying more to be a stylist than a fashion designer at Bunka College. Is that right?
I did the fashion editorial course, but I also did the general courses. We had to do a bit of pattern cutting, make some clothes, do some photography, and we were taught a bit about the business side of fashion. We did some graphic design, too, specifically for editorial work.

What made you pick that course? Did you want to work in magazines?
I was always really interested in magazines, and in fashion, but not from the perspective of actual fashion design. I wanted to buy fashion, but I wanted to work in magazines.

Did you have an intention to do things that were deliberately Japanese within your work or has that not been part of your thought process?
No. I hated Japanese culture! I thought overseas stuff was much cooler. For example, when I was younger and renting apartments, most of the rooms in them would be *washitsu* or traditional rooms with tatami mats, and I would just refuse to live there. I really hated it. I wanted to live somewhere with Western flooring.

It's often assumed by people outside of Japan that there is a strong intention to reflect or embody typical Japanese elements in design work by creators from here. Yet I've often found that many Japanese designers actively avoid that culture and aesthetic. They just want to be seen as designers, not designers defined by where they're from…
Well, over time – and it's taken a *long* time – I have actually grown to appreciate Japanese culture. The Japanese details I used in the first Kenzo show got a good response and I'm really into the pottery that I've been doing recently as a hobby.

I can see that it's grown over the years. It's kind of normal to push back against all that when you're younger.
It was quite a big deal because I was *so* against it, but you're right, it's an aging-process thing. I recently met up with Jonio [Jun Takahashi]; we hadn't spoken about Japanese culture for a *long* time, but we found we were both really into it now.

When I came to your office with him last year, you were both looking at an auction of Japanese antiques. Sometimes

'I hated Japanese culture! I thought overseas stuff was much cooler. I'd refuse to live in apartments with traditional rooms and their tatami mats.'

'A lot of other people in the streetwear scene were making T-shirts, but they didn't really have any real plan or vision. I wanted to do it properly.'

Introduction text by Rahim Attarzadeh.

We know…

Kentucky
Fried Chicken

エポック社の
パーフェクトボウリング
フックボールコントロール装置つき

it takes a long time to appreciate where you come from. How long after college was it before you started making clothing? Was the Nowhere store period with Jonio straight after college?
When I moved to Tokyo I was already a fan of Hiroshi [Fujiwara] and Kan [Takagi], and I loved the subculture around those guys.[5] I met Jonio when I first got to Bunka and he introduced me to a bunch of people in Tokyo, including Hiroshi. He was looking for an assistant at the time, so I started working with him while I was still at college. I did that for about three years, gradually going less and less to school. Working with Hiroshi was such an amazing experience. I learned so much from him – just his way of working. In Japanese terms, the relationship is like a master-student situation, but Hiroshi would treat me like I was one of his friends, and that was very different to how things normally work in Japan. It was so much fun. I didn't think of it as work, but it wasn't play either. We DJed at local venues around Japan, and I learned about music, culture, everything.

When did you start developing your own style, creating your own products?
I was doing styling at about the same time I got a part-time job as a writer for *Popeye*. I'd do two pages each issue, introducing new products to the readers. After that, someone introduced me to *Hot Dog Press*.[6] By then, Jonio and I were really close, and Hitomi Okawa, the [older and established] designer of Milk, really looked out for us.[7] She thought we were really interesting, and called the editor-in-chief of *Takarajima*[8] and got us a monthly column together [called 'Last Orgy 2']. At that time Jonio was selling Undercover in Milk.

It's interesting that there is a link to Milk. Hiroshi was also linked to it. There are also ties to the Gothic and Lolita scene, even if it's aesthetically different.
I think Milk was a bit more punk compared to what came after it. But there are common roots; they were all connected.

Can you remember when you decided to start making clothes? Didn't the opening of Nowhere happen a bit later? Was that when you began to make actual product before?
It was provoked when Milk decided to stop selling Undercover. One reason was the CEO of the store – who was Hitomi's mother – decided to stop selling other brands in the store, and only sell Milk. So we began thinking about what to do and thought we could try to set up our own shop where we could sell Undercover. So, on 1 April 1993, we opened the shop and published a column in *Takarajima* announcing it. We had a lot of fans who knew us from doing the column and they would come to the shop, so our sales were quite good. Still, the major players in the mainstream fashion world were pretty cold towards us.

Was starting to make clothes yourself about filling a gap in the market or was it more like self-expression? I would imagine that Stüssy and other US labels were influential at that point.
At this point, my full-time job was styling, and my part of the shop was all about the stuff that I'd been selecting: sneakers, varsity jackets, second-hand stuff. I'd go on buying trips to the US to buy stuff that you couldn't get in Japan. Just stuff I thought was cool. This was in college towns, like Boston and so on. It was more from an editorial perspective than a fashion perspective at this point. But I soon became too busy to keep going on these buying trips, and it was starting to stress me out. Jonio saw how impossible it was becoming for me because I was getting increasingly busy as a stylist, and so he was like, 'Why don't you just start making your own clothes?' And that was the start of it all.

Was it the fact that you already had an audience that made the clothing pretty successful right from the beginning?
Yes. The store was busy from the start.

You're known for being interested in the roots and the most authentic work from any given scene – both as a stylist and also a huge collector. Would you say artistic interpretations of what you love to collect and reimagine is a component of your creative practice? For example, some of the collaborations and collections for Human Made seemed inspired by Americana and denim culture, like the Levi's, and George Cox brothel creepers, but you then created your own versions. A lot of those Bape items had that basis, but with extra layers applied.
There is a need to understand the roots of what you're interested in, and if you are really interested in something, you want to go as far as you can. Also, and I think this is really important, what probably didn't exist very much until Bape, was the use of a platform to support other artists. We call that collaboration now, but in a way that didn't really exist until the time around Bape. One of the most important things about Bape was that it expanded the repertoire in all areas.

You got a lot of people to work with you. It's important to note that that changed the whole paradigm; Bape expanded the language of streetwear.
The difference is something in my character. Compared to everyone else around me on the scene at the time, who was just wanting to make some fly shit, I really had a vision for a proper brand. I'd been influenced by the DC brands when I was growing up – Yohji, Comme, Issey, and Kenzo – so I wanted to make a proper brand for myself. A lot of other people in the streetwear scene were making T-shirts, but they didn't really have any real plan or vision. I wanted to do it properly, so I immediately started doing exhibitions, and tried to present Bape as a serious brand that was more than just T-shirts. That's been my approach from the beginning; I really wanted to do it all properly.

That is very clear in the way you work.
That has been how I've worked since the beginning.

The blueprint really started with what you did with Bathing Ape, and continues with what you're doing now.
The agenda was really set by Bathing Ape. What was interesting about it was the product range *and* the way that it was all sold. It was like a complete picture. It's not like any of this was planned out in advance; everything just comes from my choices and the decisions I made. Like when I opened the first Bape store in 1997: until then I had always asked my friends to do the interiors, never really using professionals, but then because I wanted to do things properly, I brought in Masamichi Katayama[9], who was an architect, to come on board. I remember he told me that normal retailers always had measurements and stipulations, like how many shelves they would want, but I told him he could do whatever he thought was best. He thought that was incredible. I was an amateur, shaping and deciding everything as I went along.

The store's success triggered a broader, international appreciation of the brand, which led to the other stores in London and the US. Had you always wanted to do that or was it just a natural part of the brand's momentum?
Opening stores in New York and London was always the aim. The first shop was Hong Kong, but around that time, there was no culture or scene there, so we closed it and reopened it three years later. That time there were 2,000 people queueing up on opening day. So in those three years, the street scene in Hong Kong had exploded.

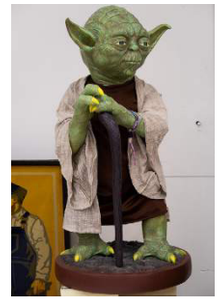
All this stuff is what we could call streetwear, and it's in a very different place to what we might consider high fashion. Jumping forward, you're now working with Kenzo, a high-fashion brand, in part because this stuff has been assimilated into the mainstream. Until Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton, the two worlds felt very separate. That's when it started to gravitate into that world. What did you used to think about high fashion? Was there a sense of 'I am different to that'?
I've always been attracted to luxury brands like LV, and wanted to buy into them, but as you say, until Marc Jacobs arrived the two worlds had never been linked. What I had done remained pretty much invisible to the people in high fashion.

Under Virgil, who you worked with, Vuitton started to do actual skate stuff, with people like Lucien Clarke, proving that the amalgamation of all these worlds you've been involved in is almost complete. Is that a good thing?
Things have changed and we've entered a new era. What was once a real subculture has become part of the global mainstream. You know, rather than what Virgil *did* at Louis Vuitton, what mattered was that LV hired him as creative director in the first place. *That* to me was the biggest signal that something had changed in the culture. Virgil was doing what you naturally do as a creative director, but the fact they chose him to head Vuitton – following on from Marc and Kim – that represented a huge change.

Let's talk about Kenzo. What was most exciting to you about the job? Did you like Kenzo growing up? Are there elements of Mr Kenzo's work you find relevant to your work for the brand?

'What didn't exist very much until Bape was the use of a platform to support other artists. We all call that collaboration now.'

'Back then, high fashion used to be pretty uncool; it was just not that cool to be only into fashion. Now *everyone* wants to be a fashion designer!'



SNOOPY

We know…

It wasn't something I really had to think about – I just knew I wanted to do it. The factors that led me to taking the role are linked to my own experience of making clothes, of founding brands, of being someone who is mostly in Japan but who understands how things work in the UK and the US, even though I should say the system in Paris is very different. I had had the experience of LV with Virgil, when there was less pressure on me personally, and I found the process really interesting. That made me realize that the opportunity at Kenzo could work. Of course, there was the fact that it was *Kenzo* – that made a lot of sense to me. He was such a legend: the guy who introduced Japanese fashion to Paris, getting on the boat in the 1960s and arriving on his own and making it.[10] And I had got to the stage where I was like, 'OK, Human Made is successful and continuing to grow', and I felt it would be nice to take on a new challenge. The opportunity at Kenzo felt really exciting and I had a new kind of vision for what I wanted to do. Because Kenzo was started by a Japanese designer, I think I found it easier to assimilate and engage with things, even though I never met Mr Kenzo himself. I was actually never particularly interested in Paris fashion; it always seemed quite distant. It's an area that I still don't understand that well, so it will be challenging, but I'm constantly learning.

Is there anything on your creative bucket list right now?
My ambition is always to do things I haven't done before, especially if they're connected to lifestyle. Like, I've never done cars, and there was talk at one stage about doing hotels. But those interesting jobs don't seem to come my way at the moment!

That will change! It seems to be that your work and your personal interests are just completely intertwined, right?
Well, I just turn my hobbies into work.

Is there other stuff you do to escape?
I like sailing and pottery, and I do wonder how long I will be doing fashion for. In the olden days, people died when they were 50, and to be able to think of something completely new at that age is quite a feat. My generation and Virgil's generation are totally different; mine was more rooted in the real, authentic world, whereas Virgil's approach was partly in the virtual world. And with the one after that, I think we'll lose the real even more to the virtual. Fashion will continue to go that way. There's a lot of hype around that at the moment, so with Kenzo I'm trying to make things more rooted in the 'real'. There's certainly a lot to think about at my age. I can't draw or paint, but I can make pottery, and I'm always interested in selling the things I make. That's my hobby becoming my job again, but it's something I can do at my own rhythm at least. [Laughs]

The homeware line is the future! Last question: music has played such a big role in your work and life. You've just released an album for which you used your creative-director skills to pull different artists together. Will you pursue being a recording artist?
Yes, I want to keep going in that direction. I feel that you can't understand fashion without understanding music, because without it you wouldn't know where to look in fashion.

It goes back to the band you were talking about at the beginning, the Checkers. Usually fashion is the expression of an allegiance to something else, and for so many people that starts with music.
Back then, high fashion used to be pretty uncool; it was just not that cool to be only into fashion. Now everyone wants to be a fashion designer – it's really strange!

1. Founded by Tory Takeuchi and Fumiya Fuji, the Checkers was an extremely popular doo-wop 'idol' band. All 31 of the band's singles, from 1983 until its split in 1992, were Top-10 hits in Japan.

2. Maebashi is 110 kilometres north of Tokyo and in 2020 had a population of 327,000.

3. *DC burando* or 'designer and character brands' refers to the era in Japanese fashion where Japanese avant-garde ready-to-wear designers such as Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto, Takeo Kikuchi and Issey Miyake became hugely popular for the aesthetic they pushed, to the point that they became 'brands' or 'designer characters' in their own right.

4. Legendary Japanese DJ and British heavy-metal and punk specialist Kensho Ohnuki organized the first London Nite in 1980 at Tsubaki House in Shinjuku.

5. Hiroshi Fujiwara and Takagi Kan were pioneers of Japan's hip-hop scene releasing their first album *Construction* under the name Tiny Panx in 1986. The band released a single entitled 'Last Orgy' in 1988; it shared its name with a magazine column the duo were then writing for *Takarajima* magazine.

6. Launched in 1979, *Hot Dog Press*, according to its publisher, is a magazine for men about 'hobbies, fashion, products and more'.

7. Hitomi Okawa's store Milk opened in 1970 and quickly became a Harajuku legend. The first store ever to stock Comme des Garçons, it was home to Otawa's reworked Japanese version of punk, which used surplus armywear and workwear fabrics.

8. Launched in 1974, *Takarajima* was an influential youth magazine exploring music, culture, fashion, and often-taboo subjects in Japan. It was closed in August 2015 by its owner Takarajimasha, which said that it had completed its 'mission … to define an era and provide new sets of values'.

9. Masamichi Katayama founded his now-renowned interior-design agency Wonderwall in 2000.

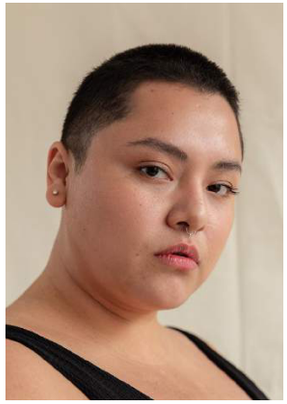
10. Born in 1939, Kenzō Takada left Japan in 1964, arriving in Paris the next year. He opened his label and first shop under the name Jungle Jap in 1970. He changed the label's name in 1972, introduced menswear in 1983, a jeans line in 1986, and fragrances in 1988, before selling the label to LVMH in 1993. Kenzō retired in 1999 and died from Covid-19 on 4 October 2020.

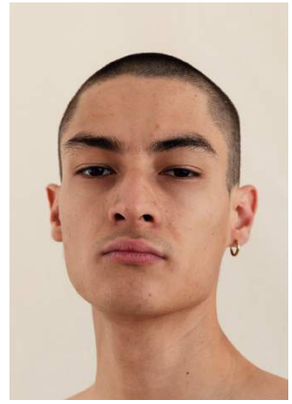
Photography assistant: Celine O'Connor. Digital artist: Elisa Franceschi. Production: Anchor Tokyo and Lalaland Productions.

‘Where are the girls who look like me?’

Guerxs started as a manifesto. It’s now Mexico’s go-to casting and modelling agency.

Interview by Ben Broome
Portrait by Zora Sicher





Casting photographs: Sinead Oña

In 2016, Maria Osado wrote a manifesto. She was 18, born and bred in Mexico City, with an interest in the global world of fashion and her possible place within it. Unable to find any diversity on the glossy pages of fashion magazines, she started a modelling and casting agency and called it Guerxs (pronounced *ware-ass*).

I'm a curator and in the years I've known Maria I've grown to appreciate the similarities in what we do. Maria grafts for her models with the same passion and conviction that I think I have when working with artists. Ferociously nurturing and protecting her culture and community, she has an uncompromising approach that has secured her a seat at some of fashion's more inaccessible tables.

What started as a written statement of frustration, anger and intent six years ago has evolved into one of the most forward-thinking modelling agencies in fashion, one flying the flag for the overlooked communities of Mexico and Latin America as a whole. With Guerxs' models on the international 'high-fashion' stage and working with photographers such as Tim Walker, Tyrone Lebon and Harley Weir, and a client list that now includes Gucci, Bottega Veneta, and Burberry, it would seem that the rest of the world is finally taking notice.

Ben Broome: Tell me about the early days of Guerxs.

Maria Osado: Guerxs started in 2016 as an online manifesto. From Instagram you could click on a link to a website where I'd posted my words. I was 18 years old; I didn't know anything about running a business, and I had no intention of seeking approval from the fashion world. It was very real, a genuine reflection of my perceptions. I had no filter. If I wrote that text today, it would be very different!

How did it evolve from manifesto into something resembling an agency?

I had the text, but I needed something actually to exist in time and space that reflected my ideas. I was asking: 'Where are these people at? Who do I want to see represented? Who do we not get to see?' I wasn't trying to convince anyone of my own personal vision, I was just asking: 'Where are the girls who look like me?'

What were you trying to say in that manifesto? Could we go a little deeper into the Guerxs philosophy?

The Guerxs manifesto was specifically addressed to the media in Mexico. I would read magazines and think, 'Whoa, okay, beauty and whiteness are very connected.' Mexicans are both light and dark skinned, but statistically, you're more likely to get a good job with the former. It's something we see all the time: from magazines to billboards to TV shows, everything is styled with a white-centric vision. I wasn't against seeing white faces, I was only asking, 'Where are the other people at?' Guerxs as an agency began as an evolution of that vision. When I started it, I was thinking about colourism, but also different types of gender expression and body types. I realized I was overlooking the impact of economic background on representation in modelling. You'd only hear about the girls who had access, who had money, connections or an in. These stories didn't resonate much with me. When I began signing people I didn't want models who only aspired to be models; that's not a reality for many of the people I work with. It was almost the opposite: 'Oh, you never thought about modelling? Let's work together!'

I know from speaking with you that certain social issues are heavily ingrained in Mexican culture. There is a stark class divide, distinct racial divisions, and widespread hypermasculinity. How has Guerxs begun to disrupt such entrenched systems?

These structural issues are bigger than Guerxs. Is fashion the battlefield? No, but the fashion industry can reflect these changing systems in the most visible way. When I started Guerxs, I was young. I had an idea; I put it out into the world and then waited to see what happened. There was a lot of pushback. Magazines wouldn't hire me here and it took me a really long time to get any Mexican clients; they doubted me the most. I had some very uncomfortable situations where the models would arrive at a fashion week and people would say, 'No, you're not models', and not let us in. Mexico's fashion industry only wants to understand diversity from an angle convenient for them. People would tolerate darker skin tones or indigenous features, which is, of course, a great thing, but if you gave them more things to digest they'd say, 'Oh, you can't be a bigger size and be queer and...' My attitude was: take it all at once, digest

'Sure, there are many top Latina models, but the other side of Latin America – the one that's not all 'glam fab' – is yet to be introduced.'

it right now. It made my job really hard back then. Six years later, I've learned so much. I can't always be so angry – I was so angry! I'll forever be radical within fashion, but I recognized that anger wasn't helping Guerxs evolve and grow in the ways I wanted it to.

What made people finally begin to listen to what Guerxs has to say?
Unfortunately, the fashion world works through validation. You have to be validated by the accepted system before anyone listens. For instance, I was 19 when I first worked with Harley Weir. I knew she was a good photographer but not much more about her. That editorial I worked on with her meant something for people in the fashion world. In Mexico, there's a mindset that the most valuable acceptance is from the Global North; people feel that if you make it there, you can make it anywhere. At the time, I found that really sad because I wanted to work in Mexico; I was extremely committed to my country.

The similarity in how we operate is partly why I wanted to interview you. We both have a responsibility to the people to whom we give a platform. As a curator, I have a responsibility to the artists I work with; I have to think about their best interests before I make any decision. Equally, as the founder of a casting agency, you have to think first and foremost about the models you work with. Especially because Mexico seems to have a spotlight on it at the moment. I was reading that in 2021 Mexico City was one of the most-visited cities in the world by US tourists. How do you feel that tourism affects you and your business? Is it a good thing?
It's inevitable. Mexico is emerging as a global capital where people come to live and exchange ideas. I benefit from this. Guerxs is a business working with foreign clients, so it would be hypocritical of me to oppose tourism, but I do hope that foreigners coming here assume more of a responsibility to understand our society. Historically, foreigners have taken so much from the people of Mexico and left them so little. Many foreigners come here, stay with friends who don't speak Spanish, eat the tacos, pay with dollars, and then leave. And then what? What's left?

What would be your advice to a creative director of a brand visiting or shooting in Mexico? Is there a way to do it ethically?
I'd say: work with Mexicans, get them involved in your creative process. We're often the only Mexicans on a shoot, and although the visual representation through casting is important, if the people making the decisions don't understand the culture, how much is *actually* changing? Representation, for me, started with the models, the faces you see on the billboards, but right now the bigger challenge is: who's sitting at the table? Are those people Mexican? I don't think it's only Mexicans who can talk about Mexico, but let's exchange ideas: we should have a say in how we're represented.

You've experienced plenty of bad practices from brands working in Mexico, especially the exploitation of Mexican culture. As a figurehead of Mexico's fashion community, do you feel a responsibility to call out those brands?
Absolutely, but we do it out of sadness, out of anger, out of really not wanting to be seen like that. The reality is that even though I'm not getting paid to consult for them – and we should, because that's a job in itself – I have to speak up when I see Mexico and Mexicans being represented in an exploitative way. Of course, I feel responsible, but there's only so much I can do. This kind of exploitation happens everywhere in the world, but especially in Third World countries. Right now, the spotlight is shining on Mexico, but who's next? Are they going to take everything from here and move onto the next country? That's what scares me. I hope that this attention from the Global North brings about more opportunities for Mexican creatives to do more, to get hired and to do what they love, because it's a fucking struggle to have a job in a creative industry in Mexico. I see my friends struggle, especially those who don't come from a comfortable situation where they can afford to work for free. They have to live: they can't be an intern; they can't not get paid. I didn't go to fashion school. My parents didn't work in fashion. What I do came to me in an organic, natural way, but I know I'm one of the lucky ones.

Guerxs models all know each other and they're part of a creative nucleus. What you're doing is championing and giving a platform not only to models, but also artists, set designers,

'I had uncomfortable situations where our models would arrive at a fashion week and people would say, 'No, you're not models', and not let us in.'

fashion designers, and others. You're at the centre of this network of incredible people; how did you grow that community?
I'm a part of many different communities, and that came from my reality. I was a teenager in Mexico City: hanging out with high-school friends, going to [record label] NAAFI parties, interning for my first mentor (and now big sister) Carla Valdivia. Those moments were my introduction to the scene I'd later become part of. The internet also played a key role in the process of finding my people. I don't feel the same way about the internet now, but I can say for sure that without social media, I probably wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now. Instagram allows you to tag locations, so I could look up a place I liked – a club, a bar, a store – see who was going there and reach out to them if they seemed cool. I met amazing people that way. I know many people were introduced to Guerxs through the internet, too; they got to know the agency online and then would come to these casting calls we held every year, like an anniversary party. I would buy tons of crazy cakes and host full days of casting. That's where I met a lot of the kids who I currently work with. It's amazing how the internet can actually play a positive role in community building.

You studied architecture at UNAM, a public university in Mexico City. Did you have to choose between life as an architect and your work with Guerxs?
I studied architecture, and although I didn't finish school, I must say that I was really fucking good at it. Since I was little I've always been very committed to whatever I set my mind to; I've always been very focused. I found architecture fascinating, and I still do, but as soon as I started working on Guerxs I realized that I'd found something that resonated with my heart. I still get into conversations about architecture, and I have a lot of friends who are architects. When I was studying I didn't sleep for years because I was doing both Guerxs and architecture school, and it was very unhealthy. It got to the point where I had to choose one or the other.

How do you measure the success of Guerxs?
For me, success is when I see other people believing in the kids who I believe in. It also has a lot to do with opening the door for the person who comes after. When I enter the room, I leave the door open so someone else can enter, too.

We moved to New York at a similar time. I moved in May 2020, but I couldn't handle it and left after six months. What's your relationship with America and New York now? Has it changed over the past two years?
It has informed my practice so much. The same way all these New Yorkers are coming to Mexico, I like to think that us Mexicans should be occupying their spaces, too. We need to position ourselves to take these opportunities. It's hard to break through into an industry as competitive as the one in New York; it's like cracking the code of the *Matrix*. Mexicans living in Mexico often don't understand the Latin American experience in the United States and the opposite is also true – it's not possible to experience both sides of the coin. For me, moving to America meant meeting New York's minority communities, getting to know those realities and learning what life is like as a first-generation migrant in the United States. The USA is proportionally still very white, but in New York City, almost a third of the population is Latin American. Where is that representation in the fashion industry? There are many top Latina models, but the other side of Latin America – the one that's not 'glam fab' – is yet to be introduced. People aren't talking about it enough. I want to be a part of jumpstarting that conversation in the United States.

I know that your partner – artist Aspen Kincaid – lives in New York. Obviously, he was one reason for your move to the States, but were there others related to Guerxs?
I'd been going back and forth to New York for so long anyway and I could see Guerxs growing. I had planted many seeds and I was seeing results. I had an important realization that New York could be my home and my place of work. I do pretty much everything, casting wise. I work with a lot of communities that are not even Latin American. There's so much diversity in New York, so many different realities colliding. There are Middle Eastern diasporas, East Asian diasporas – it's endless. I obviously cannot speak for everyone – I've never tried to do that – but with Guerxs, everyone's invited and everyone can be involved.

'Representation started with the faces you see on billboards, but now the bigger challenge is: who's sitting at the table? Are those people Mexican?'

Am I right in thinking that Guerxs represents 'Latinx' models as a whole? Obviously, you focus on Mexico, but do you cast elsewhere in Latin America?
The 'Latinx' term is interesting because it's not something I'm even familiar with. It's a term that was birthed in the United States and a lot of Latin American people don't identify with it. 'Latin American' is the term that resonates with me. Back to the question, though! People want to move to America to chase the American dream; well, Mexico gets to be that for a lot of Latin Americans. Mexico is seen as the United States of South America. This informs a lot of my work because I don't want only to talk about Mexico, I also want to take into account perspectives from all over Latin America. For me, travelling is deeply political. I'm trying to expand Guerxs, and I would love to go to Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. I would love to work with models in all these different countries, but first I have to do the research. I don't want to be that tourist who just arrives and takes, takes, takes.

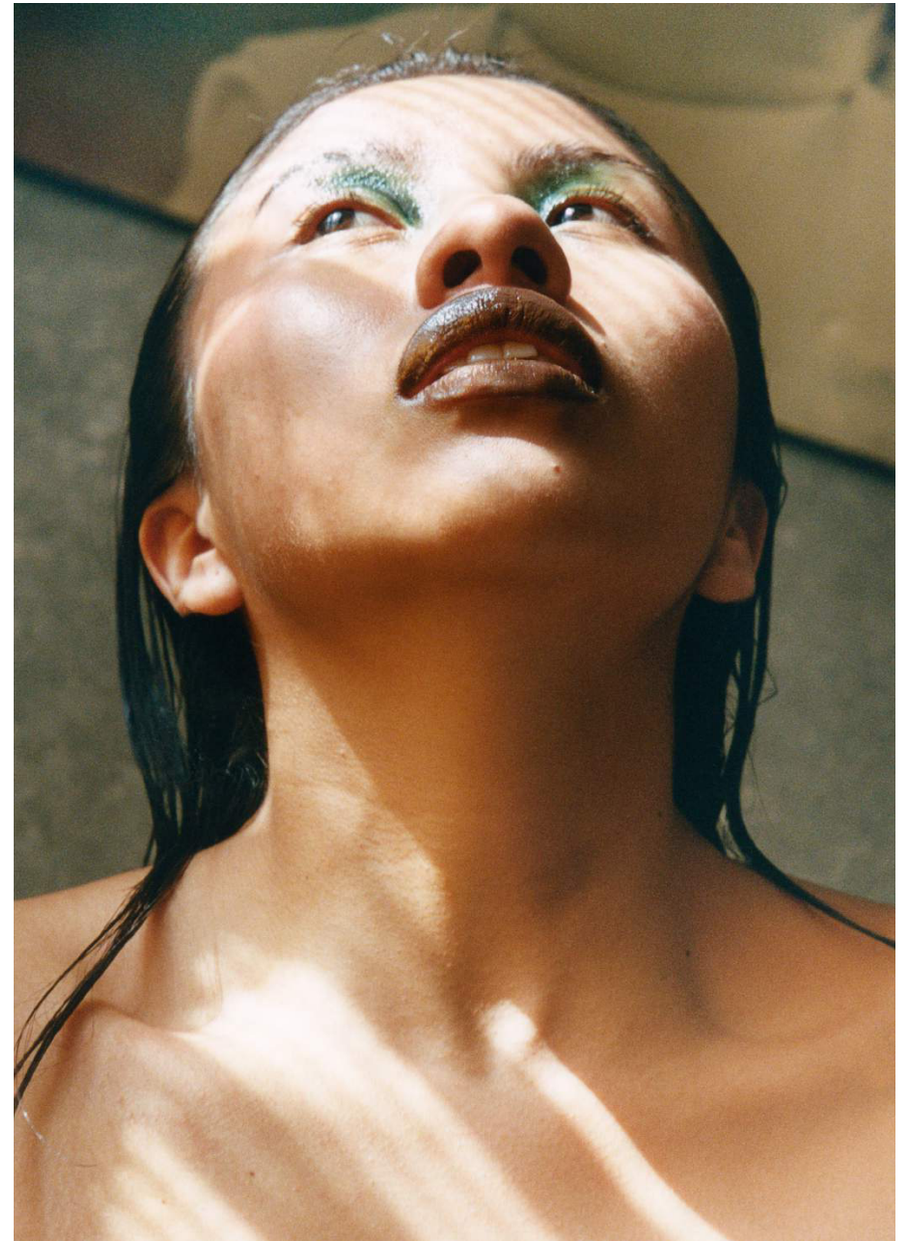
Tell me about this shoot for *System*. Is it a pictorial representation of exactly what you do in terms of bringing your community together and giving Mexican talent a platform? Who's involved? What was the process?
The team for this shoot represents relationships that I've built over the course of my life. Victor Barragán is one of my closest friends and collaborators; he doesn't call himself a stylist, but I wanted him to style this shoot. I wanted a different point of view from someone who embraces so many of my own ideals in his own way. Zora Sicher, the photographer, is one of my best friends and, being from New York, she embodies this balance between my life in Mexico and America. It's so important for me that Mexicans and non-Mexicans collaborate, do projects together, and have these conversations. This shoot felt like one of the first times that I've had the creative freedom to speak from my own perspective. Usually, I'm working for someone else and executing someone else's ideas. This was an opportunity to share exactly what this specific time in Mexico means to me. One of the shoot locations is a theme park full of miniature iconic monuments from all around the world. You have the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, the Hollywood sign. For me, this shoot, and Guerxs as a whole, is about seeing Mexico in the world, but also seeing the world in Mexico. Another of the locations is the house my uncle built. He was an architect and spent 20 years of his life putting it all together. It's a sanctuary; the house has never been seen, so shooting there was a very personal experience. It's as though I'm taking you to see my family; I'm showing you what my world looks like. It's an intimate thing. Each of my friends who visits Mexico has to meet my grandmother. I wanted that sense of intimacy and family to permeate into the shoot's visual language.

My favourite memory of being in Mexico with you is that incredible meal your grandmother cooked for us!
Beautiful. That, for me, is what makes us closer.

CDMX

'At Guerxs, we have always wanted to see Mexico in the world, and a reflection of the world in Mexico.'

Photographs by Zora Sicher
Styling by Victor Barragan



Previous page: Samuel wears a skirt and sweater by Situationist.
This page: Eric wears a coat by GmbH.
Opposite page: Maria wears a bodysuit by Vaquera,
skirt by Minena, and shoes by Barragán.

Opposite page: Xanat wears a dress by Fracazototal.
This page: Marcela wears a backpack by Vaquera.

This page: Eric wears shoes and trousers and carries a purse by Barragán.
Opposite page, top: Samuel wears a necklace by GmbH.
Opposite page, bottom: Xanat wears a dress by Fracazototal.

This page: Ambar wears a top by Angela Reyna, a belt by Minena, high boots by Ant, and her own underwear.
Opposite page: Maria wears a top by Roberto Sanchez and trousers by Natalia Saavedra

This page: Samuel wears boots by GmbH.
Opposite: Maria wears a bodysuit by Vaquera.

Casting and creative direction: Maria Osado. Models: Eric Buendia, Xanat Dakarya, Maria Gonzalez, Samuel Guerrero, Marcela VelMur, Ambar Venegas, all at Guerxs.
Make-up: Thania Diaz. Hair: Mariana PaMa. Styling assistant: Youri Noyola.

‘Virgil changed the perspective.’

Virgil Abloh’s final season of Louis Vuitton men’s accessories, as selected by this issue’s contributors.

Photographs by Charles Negre

Jodie Barnes

Louis Vuitton Ears Hat

‘Virgil said that you don’t have to choose between high fashion or streetwear, and this cap felt like the perfect combination of both. It is a fitting crown for a ground-breaking and much-missed force –the “King”.’

Daniel Roseberry

Louis Vuitton Lock It

'You know when you're crying and through the tears, right before you blink them away, it looks like the world is underwater – that's what this reminded me of. It takes something so familiar and ubiquitous as the Monogram and makes it poetic. Virgil really was able to find poetry in the machinery.'

Rick Owens

Louis Vuitton Paint Can

'The cheekiness and wit of this bag summarizes his playful irreverance for me.'

Nell Kalonji

Louis Vuitton Keepall 50B

'Virgil was an incredibly talented multidisciplinary creative, but he was also a connector and a community builder. He brought people with him and together. That's also what he did with his designs – like taking a classic bag and manipulating the iconic Louis Vuitton Monogram to invite people to connect with the house's storied heritage without excluding its long-standing customers. He built a truly inclusive, global community.'

Vanessa Reid

Louis Vuitton LV Sunrise Necklace and LV Paradise Bracelet

'I always appreciated and admired Virgil's playfulness. In a way, these necklaces remind me of the kind of candy friendship bracelets I used to love as a child. It's his celebration of innocence that resonates with me.'

Glenn Martens

Louis Vuitton Ellipse Backpack

'Virgil blurred the expected and accepted. He opened doors for so many of us.
He set the way for younger generations and told them to go fight for their dreams!'

Fraser Cooke

Louis Vuitton Paint Can

'This item perfectly captures Virgil's whimsical, smart and pop vision, and his signature perspective.
Virgil was not afraid to play with the codes that are the pillars of the strongest brands – whether it was the Louis Vuitton Monogram or the house's association with bags and luggage – and then add his "sampling".
This bag is typical of Virgil's playfully unique work at Louis Vuitton.'

Tim Blanks

Louis Vuitton Paint Can

'I look at Virgil's Paint Can bag and it reminds me of how much he loved Marcel Duchamp, who turned a urinal into a work of art. Recontextualizing – that's how Virgil made worlds collide so irresistibly.'

Nigo

Louis Vuitton Paradise Chain Bracelet

'I really like the jewellery that Virgil designed at Louis Vuitton. He gave me a necklace a few years ago that is similar to this.'

Lighting assistant: Maxence Meyer. Production: Lambert Lambert.

Nadine Ijewere

Louis Vuitton Trainer Sneaker

'I chose this item because a sneaker did not used to be considered a luxury item and I like how Virgil changed the perspective on what luxury was. He introduced new avenues through items of clothing that gave a new perspective. Virgil created a new luxury.'

Dingyun Zhang

Louis Vuitton Paint Can

'From fashion to sneaker culture and art, Virgil opened doors for creatives from many different backgrounds. Part of his legacy will be how he allowed artists to be appreciated for their own visions by subverting luxury and the arts.'

‘A sip of Buck’s Fizz at Vogue House turned my head forever.’

Immoderate aesthete Hamish Bowles recounts a life *oh-so* less ordinary – from Beaton to Bowery and back again.

Interview by Tim Blanks
Portraits by Tom Johnson

There is something Bergmanesque about the notion of a world of interiors, suggestive of the endlessly unfolding lotus of the human psyche. A magazine that focused on people's environments and lifestyles might more logically acknowledge *exteriors* in its title, but one of the enduring attractions of *World of Interiors* in its four decades of existence has been its weaving together of inside and out. It's been a celebration of the idiosyncratic – often eccentric – self as expressed through decor, art, architecture, gardens, and accumulations of all kinds. Hamish Bowles arrives as editor-in-chief at the magazine – his first issue was published in March – as a man whose entire life been remarkably steeped in such things. 'Precocious' is an inadequate descriptive for a seven-year-old who lambasted Cecil Beaton's Edwardian fantasia in *My Fair Lady* for its lack of historical accuracy; I'm more partial to 'intrepid'. Like an Enid Blyton character, Baby Bowles was fearless in his pursuit of adventure, although the lost treasure he found was more usually in junk shops and jumble sales than pirates' caves or smugglers' hideaways. From the outset, he was gifted with an acute awareness that all the objects he collected had a story to tell about the people who had once possessed them. Bowles has made it his life's work to learn those stories and pass them on. A repository of vast knowledge about the arcane workings of self-expression, he has made himself an exemplar of the very notion, a dandy as definitive in our times as his hero Beaton was in his.

Towards the end of our conversation, Bowles muses that he's lived his life backwards. Blyton to Beaton to Benjamin Button – a whole world of interiors right there. Exteriors-wise, he's grown a moustache ('to try and give myself more authority,' he claims). We're in his office at Vogue House in London. He's still waiting for his smart desk but, enthusiastically deep in a mess of layouts for upcoming issues, he is clearly a man in his element, interior life and exterior world in enviable harmony. Cometh the hour, cometh the man at *World of Interiors*.

Hamish Bowles: I've been styling houses for 30 years for *Vogue*, and a bit at the end of my *Harpers & Queen* life. I joined *Harpers* as a junior fashion editor and then ultimately the fashion style director. It was all fashion shoots, a lot of locations and styling of interiors because there were a lot of narrative stories involved. Then I sort of initiated the idea of photographing women of style in their environments. So we did Madame Lacroix and Bettina Graziani, and Inès de la Fressange, and C.Z. Guest[1] at home in Long Island. That kind of thing. I adored doing that because it was a folding-in of the idea of self-presentation and how you created an environment, and how autobiographical those rooms were. I mean, with all those women, their environments were an extension of how they presented themselves, how they dressed themselves. So that was really fun. And then the strangest thing happened in retrospect: Gabé Doppelt, who had been Anna [Wintour]'s PA when she was at British *Vogue*, was producing some of the back-of-book stories for American *Vogue*. She called me up and said, 'I hear you've got a great apartment. Can we do a story?' That was my first apartment on Westbourne Park Road and Powis Terrace, which was about the size of this office. Patrick Kinmonth interviewed me.[2] I was very pleased, though it was quite a surprise because I was working for Hearst essentially.

That was the lavender flat. When you walked past it at night, it was practically glowing. Everyone seemed to know it was where you lived.

Really? How funny. The hilarious thing was after I had just finished it – by which I mean physically painting it myself – I was so proud of the glowing lavender with chartreuse accents, and the electrician came because I wanted to reposition a light switch. He had a magic marker and did a big X on the wall, and he said, 'Oh god, I bet you'll be glad when you can get rid of all this crap with a lick of magnolia!' He was thinking I had inherited some freakish apartment. Anyway, the story ran in the September issue of *Vogue*, and by that time I was actually working there because I'd got a call in the summer totally out of the blue from Anna. We had open-plan offices at *Harpers* – it was like a fish tank – and there was this rather crisp voice on the end of the line, saying, 'Hello, this is Anna.' I literally turned crimson. She said, 'I'm just looking at the pictures of your flat in London. It looks very interesting and I can see you're interested in decorating, so this job has come up and I think you would be perfect for it.' The style editor Catie Marron was leaving the magazine so she could focus on decorating her own apartment at 714 Park Avenue. It was quite interesting because people wouldn't have thought of me at that point as being an interiors person, but I was obviously obsessed by them. I'd already been a fashion editor for seven years. I joined *Harpers* in 1985-1986. They'd offered me a job before I'd finished at Saint Martins…

You did the 'Teenage' issue of *Harpers & Queen*, didn't you?

That issue [August 1983] was my first introduction. I was doing my foundation course at Saint Martins and *Harpers & Queen*. I'd heard about the issue and I went in to see Vanessa de Lisle and Elizabeth Walker and they assigned me the menswear pages. I worked with Mario [Testino] for the first time and we did a story at the Royal Academy, which I called 'Walk on the Wilde Side' and was altogether not appropriate for a teenage issue. It was quite fun. It was my first ever cover line: 'and Hamish Bowles shortens the trouser.' Everything was above the ankle. Take that, Thom Browne! Anyway, it went down very well. Then they didn't really like the slightly earnest, Edwardian, uniform-y schoolgirl story that the women's fashion editor had done so they asked me to do a womenswear story as well. So I thought I would do *The Women*[3] and I went to Stephen Jones on Lexington Street. That was probably the first time we met. He'd done all these divine little hats with spotted-chenille veils; they couldn't have been more Adrian. Antony Price had done all these broad-shouldered suits. So I did this whole thing, and then Vanessa de Lisle appeared halfway through the shoot and said, 'Oh, this looks old, old, old and I want young, young, young!'. We ended up with poor Annabel Schofield with this backcombed hair, literally looking like she had put her fingers in an electric socket. I had to bite the bullet. In fact, very funnily I was just reminded of it because I recently found the original Polaroids for that shoot.

You were doing *The Women* for the teenage issue?

Yep. Vanessa de Lisle, in retrospect, politely said, 'It didn't smell like teen spirit.' She was thinking of nice 'hooray' girls at… oh my god, what were those Chelsea clubs those girls used to go to? Anyway, that sort of vibe. They asked me back to do freelance things after that and I was also doing things for *The Face* and some of Franca [Sozzani]'s magazines in Italy, even though I was still at Saint Martins. Then, in my work-experience year, that sort of amped up, and I was doing things for *Harpers*. John Galliano had just graduated and he and Amanda Harlech – Grieve as she then was – would spend every waking moment together conceptualizing and talking about fashion theory. She had been the junior fashion editor at *Harpers* and when she left, they offered me her job. My tutors Felicity Green, Catherine Samuels, Geoffrey Aquilina Ross had slightly despaired of me.[4] They kept trying to give me more downmarket assignments, 'Why don't you do a best-of-the-high-street kind of thing?', and I would go off and do something unbelievably esoteric at C&A. Because I would elevate everything that was given to me.

It felt like *Harpers* was much more fashion forward than *Vogue* at that time.

It was halfway between *Vogue* and what Tina Brown was then doing at *Tatler*. It had that same irreverent in-house thing. Tina's strapline was 'The Magazine that Bites the Hand that Reads It'; *Harpers* was a sort of haughtier version of that, I suppose. But it was very fun and it suited me because our readership demographic was more a woman of substance. I felt it gave me licence to do quite a lot of ball-gown stories. When I first went in as a junior, I was doing the 'Fashion Bazaar' pages at the back of the book. At that point, there was a lot of logomania, and brands that were perceived as being a bit dusty like Gucci and Pucci were making those horse-bit loafers into an irony-redux thing, and there were a lot of young designers: BodyMap and Joe Casely-Hayford, Rifat Ozbek. That was the back of book. Then Nicholas Coleridge took over from Willie Landels as editor-in-chief and he asked me to lunch at the Caprice. There had been a slight revolving door of people coming and going since Vanessa de Lisle's departure as fashion director, and I was being very productive and going off and doing lots of shoots, so he offered me the job. At the end of the lunch, Nick said, 'Can you remind me how old you are?' I said, 'I'm 22, but nearly 23', and he replied, 'Promise me you will never tell any of our older advertisers that.' So that was that. I was doing all the covers and the principal fashion stories and it was immense fun, working with people like Mapplethorpe and Angus McBean,

'My father would be driving us along and if we saw a junk shop my mother and I would jump out and rush inside, while he'd wait in the car, absolutely furious.'

'The sale of the contents of Beaton's house was my first trip away from home; I was 14 and took buses across country. I found his grave, and was sobbing.'

David Seidner,[5] a lot with Mario. We went around the world and did stories in Egypt, Peru, Brazil, Spain and Russia. It was extraordinary.

It feels like such a shame that you never got a chance to work with Cecil Beaton.
You know, he was just not quite my generation, alas. He had been punched by Robert 'Mad Boy' Heber-Percy,[6] and a bottle of perfume fell on his head and brought on a stroke. He didn't live as long as he might have lived. I think he was 76 when he died. I was already totally obsessed, of course, from a very early age. I found a copy of *The Glass of Fashion*[7] in a jumble sale and read it voraciously one summer holiday with my dad, while we drove round Britain in a VW camper van with an itinerary I had given him entirely predicated on the location of costume museums. He was very long suffering. The sale of the contents of Beaton's house, Reddish, in Broad Chalke, was my first-ever trip away from home; I took buses across country. I was 14, staying in a bed and breakfast, and it was revelatory, going to see the house. I went to the churchyard in the village and found his grave, and was sobbing.

What do you think triggered your obsession?
I remember very vividly my mother taking me to see *My Fair Lady* at the cinema in Canterbury. I must have been seven or eight, I think, when that opening credit came up with an impressive job description for Cecil Beaton – sets, decor, costumes, art direction, whatever – and I very vividly remember her explaining to me who he was. Then I was a little bit sniffy about *My Fair Lady* because I thought it was a poor show that those Edwardian ladies had been given Cleopatra winged eye make-up and Eliza, in Mrs Higgins' conservatory, was wearing a dress that Marc Bohan might have designed for Dior in 1964...

So you knew all of this already? At seven or eight years, you were picking apart the visual inaccuracies of *My Fair Lady*?
Yes, absolutely. I mean now I can see that it was deliberately for theatrical effect, but I was highly unamused at that point, because I was fully immersed in more of a Piero Tosi world of absolute scrupulous accuracy.[8]

How was a seven-year-old exposed to Piero Tosi, for Pietro's sake?
Well, I got obsessed because the colour supplements had a big story on *Ludwig*, which I admittedly didn't see for a while.[9] I saw the pictures of Romy Schneider. I think Snowdon was the art director of the *Sunday Times Magazine*, and he put a lot of the film's costumes into it. I certainly saw *Death in Venice*; don't ask me how. Actually, there was a Visconti series at Kent University in Canterbury, which I went to see. I remember *The Innocent*. I didn't see the realist early ones until a bit later. I was completely obsessed with costume and everything being scrupulously accurate and not stagy. It is so crazy to think of that now.

From what I understand, you were essentially rummaging around and finding bits of costume as soon as you could walk. I know you had very supportive parents, but they were hardly of that world. What do you think was your Rosebud?
I was very lucky in that when I was aged between four and nine, we lived in Hampstead Garden Suburb and our next-door neighbour was Dr Ann Saunders who was the secretary of the Costume Society and she could see that I had an interest that she then fuelled. She gave me those Winsor & Newton costume books you could colour in,[10] period silhouette paper dolls from the V&A, all that kind of thing. I was obsessed with those. I think that my Rosebud moment was probably a couple of things. My mum remembers me, at about four, when there was an Indian woman walking towards us in a sari, and I was obsessed with it; I had to feel it because it seemed like it was made of spun gold, such a magical thing. Mum had a dress in the back of her closet, a cerise taffeta off-the-shoulder, short evening dress. Polly Peck, though it was actually a Dior copy.[11] It had two sets of bows, two straps and bow ties on each bare shoulder. I used to dress up in that and it smelled delicious and made a satisfying taffeta sound as you swished it around. It was such a surprising thing because it didn't seem to relate to the woman that I knew, who had gone through a very 1960s transition at that point and was wearing crushed velvet and patchouli and skinny-rib sweaters with no bra underneath. It just seemed a magical thing that there was this other life that this dress could tell me about.

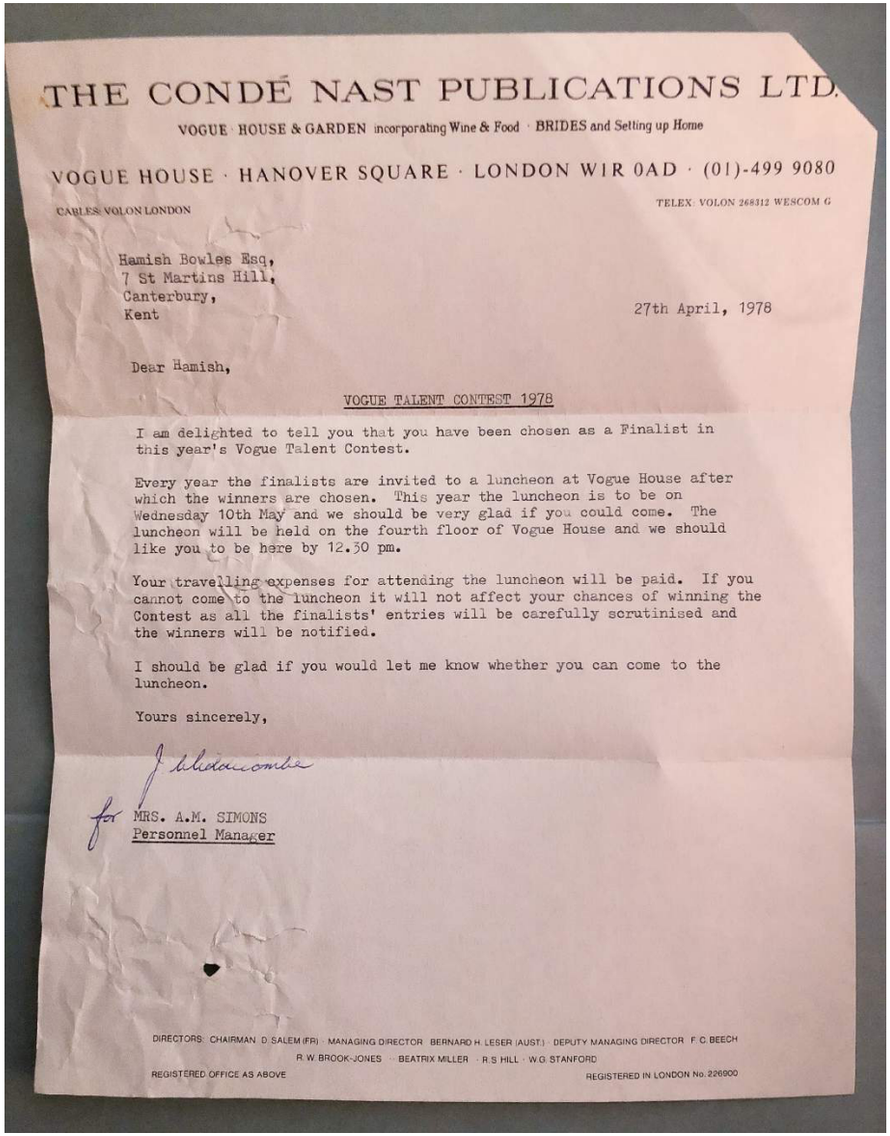
'And I'm sure you know the story about when Sadler's Wells did a jumble sale to raise funds and I found a Balenciaga suit for 50p...'

Bowles, aged 2, in a mini-Mod black vinyl raincoat and matching fisherman's hat, Belsize Park.

Bowles, aged 18, a student on the foundation art course at Saint Martin's School of Art. 'Fondly channelling Sebastian Flyte at Much Hadham House, home of sculptor Michy Herbert, and once home of the poet Walter de la Mare. Photographed by my mother, Anne Bowles.'

Left: 'Aged 19 in c.1982, this was my winsome look when I started on the BA fashion degree course at Saint Martin's. The 1940s American cotton bow tie was red, cream and blue and found at FLIP; the 1920s beige worsted suit was found in a charity shop, I believe.' Centre and right, from c.1984: 'I had grown my hair to my shoulders in a foppish Oscar Wilde look, then had it cut into this Napoleonic kiss curl by Huw at Atlas, the hairdresser in the basement of Crolla on Dover Street. A portrait of me (with the earlier Wildean look) featured on its brand notepaper.'

Hamish Bowles Archives.



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Hamish Bowles Esq,
7 St Martins Hill,
Canterbury,
Kent

27th April, 1978

Dear Hamish,

VOGUE TALENT CONTEST 1978

I am delighted to tell you that you have been chosen as a Finalist in this year's Vogue Talent Contest.

Every year the finalists are invited to a luncheon at Vogue House after which the winners are chosen. This year the luncheon is to be on Wednesday 10th May and we should be very glad if you could come. The luncheon will be held on the fourth floor of Vogue House and we should like you to be here by 12.30 pm.

Your travelling expenses for attending the luncheon will be paid. If you cannot come to the luncheon it will not affect your chances of winning the Contest as all the finalists' entries will be carefully scrutinised and the winners will be notified.

I should be glad if you would let me know whether you can come to the luncheon.

Yours sincerely,

for MRS. A.M. SIMONS
Personnel Manager

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Hamish Bowles Archives.

Letter to the 14-year-old Bowles announcing him as one of the finalists of the *Vogue* Talent Contest, 1978.
'When I got a letter with the *Vogue* stamp on the envelope, it literally made my heart stop.'

An early lesson in the transformative power of fashion.
Yes, I would say that, very much so. I saw the sari; I found this dress. I went to see *Coppélia*[12] and was obsessed with all the peasant girl, multicolour ribbons swirling around. All of it signalling all the different messages that clothing could convey and how powerful it could be. And at the time I read so much. I was reading all the historical books by Jean Plaidy,[13] Tudor England and that sort of thing. I was really obsessed by what the characters were wearing and how they looked. That was such an important part of reading any kind of historical novel, being able to evoke in my mind just exactly how the characters were dressed. I started going to the V&A costume court, and then all those costume museums, in particular the one that Doris Langley-Moore[14] had done in Bath, because everything was in dioramas, so it was like those books had come to life. There would be some sedan chair and livery footmen transporting the lady.

When did the interest expand to contemporary fashion? Your father told a story about you identifying a Balenciaga at the age of eight or so.
Something like that.

How?
The key costume museums were the V&A, the Museum of Costume in Bath, and then Castle Howard[15] had a costume court, and Platt Hall in Manchester. In those days, in a lot of stately homes, there would be a dusty bedroom with half a dozen 18th-century dresses on makeshift stands. I had started collecting fashion, from going with my mum to junk shops. She was totally obsessed with junk shops and antique shops, and we would play this game. My father would be driving the car and if we saw a junk shop we would scream and he would screech to a halt with life-threatening urgency. We'd jump out and hold hands and rush into the shop, while he would wait in the car, absolutely furious.

What a fabulous dad.
That must have been when I was very young, because they separated when I was nine. And then I would buy, with my pocket money, little things that told a story. Edwardian gloves, glove stretchers or crimping irons or a pair of 1920s dance shoes, and then I started getting things at jumble sales. I had a stripped-pine chest of drawers and the bottom drawer would house all these treasures. I had a card-index filing system which, thank god, my father kept, with little cards that would say things like, 'Edwardian lace fan, tortoiseshell handle, circa 1905, 20p, Bexhill-on-Sea, jumble sale' and the date. Then a little thing about it. It got a bit more advanced. Through Dr Ann Saunders, I eventually joined the Costume Society myself. I was obviously their youngest-ever member and I would go to seminars – which was another completely crazy thought – on how to create little acid-free tissue paper pads to store things. I remember there was a woman called Imogen Nichols who had a costume collection. I befriended all these older women – I considered them old ladies – who had collections of clothes. Imogen lived in a village in Kent and she would occasionally do a costume exhibit in the local church hall. One time she did a sort of fundraising fete for the church, stands of pickles and jams and some clothes, and I got a suit that someone had donated by a London couturier called Ronald Paterson,[16] which was quite Balenciaga: a cream silk three-piece with black penny spots. I do remember that the flat buttons had all been covered so that the penny spot was in the centre of each button. Very couture. I thought that was fabulous. I was reading about all of this in *The Glass of Fashion*, so I knew who Balenciaga and Chanel and Dior and all these taste-making ladies were. I'd go to Little Venice in the hope of catching a glimpse of Diana Cooper.[17] I never did, though I did see Cathleen Nesbitt[18] in South Kensington, which got me very excited.

'The boys at my school in Highgate wore pork-pie hats and two-tone suits and would go to Madness concerts and shag girls from Camden High.'

Did you *ever* see Diana Cooper?
Yes, I did see her at a couple of shows. I must have been on my foundation course at Saint Martins or between my sixth form. I went to the opening night of *Another Country*,[19] and Nicky Haslam[20] was escorting Diana Cooper and my excitement could not be contained. Sure enough, she had that sailor's hat with the diamond brooch. She was absolutely the part… And I'm sure you know the story when Sadler's Wells did a jumble sale to raise funds and I found a Balenciaga suit for 50p…

And you've still got it, of course.
Still got it, yes.

What would it be worth now?
Well, more than 50p. But they are still remarkably reasonably priced. That was very exciting.

What was the urge to collect, do you think? Was it to possess?
I just found it very exciting to have these tangible objects. I found them so potent. I think at the beginning it was just the idea of the stories that sartorial objects could tell you about the time in which they were created, the circumstances in which they might have been worn. If you look at a 1912 Poiret or a 1903 Worth or a 1926 Chanel, you understand so much of what was happening at the time. I enjoyed it for that, although I wanted to hold on to those memories in a way. I think that is probably what stirred me in the beginning, combined with how excited and energized I had been by going to these costume museums around the country.

Were you a difficult child?
Not, not difficult, but very single-minded. I realize now that it is quite an unusual gift to be so uniquely focused on what interests you at such an early age.

Obsessed, as you said.
I could use that word, too. I think my parents saw that, too, and encouraged it. I look back at my 12-year-old self and I was interested in exactly the same things as I am interested in now. For my parents, it was just what life was at the time, but now I look back and it was unusual.

How did your peers treat you?
I kept that side of my life quite private to a certain extent. I mean, the girlfriends I had grown up with, they were excited by it. They got corralled into acting in the plays that I had written, primarily to showcase costumes. But when I started going to secondary school and realized that a lot of the things I was interested in were outside the usual remit of a 13-year-old British schoolboy, I kept it to myself.

You didn't like secondary school?
Yes and no. I went to two secondary schools, a grammar school in Canterbury and then another school for sixth form when we moved back to London. I enjoyed the first one because I was passionate about English and history and art, and I had great inspiring teachers, and I was very into it. I had a fairly robust network of friends. I was becoming more and more interested in fashion, which I think came from seeing copies of British *Vogue*. I was excited by the world evoked, particularly in the more narrative stories that I now recognize were largely corralled into place by Grace Coddington, working with photographers like Helmut Newton and David Bailey. I think I was 10 when the first *Vogue* really spoke to me: it was a Bailey cover of Anjelica Huston and Manolo Blahnik caught in a not-entirely convincing – in retrospect – embrace on a beach in the south of France, and there was this whole narrative of a triangular relationship.[21] Not that I would have been aware of that. I know that Anjelica was wearing a Bruce Oldfield jersey dress on the cover. He must have just graduated from Saint Martins at that point.

My mum was teaching catering before she did photography. She took out a lot of *Vogue*s from the library and she would bring them home, and that really fuelled my interest. But no, it started even earlier than that, because there was a shop called Chic of Hampstead in Hampstead, and Mum would go there and window-shop and I would do the same. It had very nice sales ladies and I think they were surprised by this little boy who wanted to know so much, and they would pull things out and explain who the designer was. And that is how I partly began to know about Jean Muir and John Bates and Zandra Rhodes, Thea Porter, those kinds of people. Then I got a book – I don't know how – that was a compendium of London fashion stores, like an *A-Z*, and basically I went through it and set off to visit all of them. There was a store in Notting Hill run by Shirley Russell[22] where she sold clothes she'd bought for the extras in *The Boyfriend*, directed by her husband Ken Russell. Through this funny tome I discovered all these shops. I caught buses all over London, from Portobello to South Molton Street, and ticked them all off. So that book would be a Rosebud.

What was your presentation at the time?
Well, it was very schoolboy, not very flamboyant. It was quite old-fashioned, I suppose. We had school uniforms; I wasn't really going crazy. I kept this world of costume and fashion apart from my school life. There was a collision when I was 14 and I noticed that British *Vogue* had an annual talent

'I was going to the Cha-Cha Club and meeting Leigh Bowery and Trojan. Leigh called me Miss Beaton funnily enough – he didn't miss a trick.'

'Fashion week, I think in London, 1985 or 1986. The navy jersey handbag was a thrilling find at the Chanel press sale. The tweed plus fours and wool jersey puttees were found in vintage stores, and the black leather evening pumps with grosgrain bows were from Anello & Davide, the theatrical shoe suppliers in Covent Garden.'

Bowles at Café de Paris, London, 1986. 'I am wearing the black version of the slubbed silk Chanel jacket and the navy jersey trousers from Jasper Conran's Chanel for Men collection. He made these specially for me, each leg a full circle so really more of a divided skirt. They swished and swirled in the most agreeable way and were a sensation on a dance floor.'

'Iain R. Webb orchestrated this sitting for *BLITZ* magazine having been inspired by my lewks assembled from my ransacking of the Chanel sample sale. I caused quite a sensation on the rough and raw Manhattan subway and I seem to remember Parisian cab drivers hurling abuse at me as I sashayed across the boulevards, but I soldiered on regardless. Iain used accessibly priced faux-Chanel pieces from brands such as Pink Soda to style his looks for the shoot. He called the story "Chanellie Queen".' Photographs by Jane Hilton. Collages by Iain R. Webb. Originally published in *BLITZ* magazine, June 1986.

Images, clockwise from top left: Niall McInerney; Derek Ridgers; 'Chanellie Queen' – republished in Iain R. Webb, *As Seen in BLITZ: Fashioning '80s Style*, ACC Art Books, 2013.

Bowles walking in the Jean-Paul Gaultier show, Autumn/Winter 1989-1990. The image appeared on the main evening news bulletin on French national broadcaster A2. 'When I came off after the first passage, I was told to be slightly less camp and more Weimar lesbian.'

'Releasing "Sugar Bowles", as Philip Treacy dubbed my drag persona. The earrings are probably Erickson Beamon, but I don't recall the white fox – evidently also swiped from a shoot… The Polaroid was taken by Iain R. Webb in the lobby of the Algonquin Hotel in Manhattan for Halloween 1991.'

'Around 1986, with Lorina Crosland, my wonderful assistant and soon a fashion editor in her own right. I'm wearing a white slub silk jacket from the Chanel press sale; I would sometimes wear one over the shoulders like a twinset. The navy and white cotton jersey shirt was by Jasper Conran from his Chanel for Men collection. He gifted me an ensemble after his bossy pattern cutter Mark Tabard told him I was a coming man. This must have been my lewk when I went for my interview with Anna Wintour at British *Vogue*.'

Images, clockwise from top left: © Institut National de l'Audiovisuel – 1989; Iain R. Webb; Niall McInerney.

competition, so I wrote in. You had to write an autobiography in 400 words or less. It would make very excruciating reading now. I think I kept it though. I do remember one of the questions was, 'Which person, living or dead, has most inspired you?' and I wrote about Cecil Beaton. And then it was, 'Which four fashions in this issue would you most like to wear or see your friends wearing?' and I wrote about that. And anyway, I put it in a little envelope, and then duly got a letter in our letterbox in Canterbury with the *Vogue* stamp on the envelope. It literally made my heart stop. The letter said I had been chosen as one of the finalists and would I come to the lunch at Vogue House in Hanover Square? Which I did and there were two very nice editors, one was Mandy Clapperton, who I remember was wearing crêpe de chine and a Panama hat, and the other, Liz Tilberis, who was very jolly and nice. And the editor-in-chief Bea Miller who was quite frightening.[23] We all sat down at the table and I had some Buck's Fizz. I was only 14, and my mother always said that turned my head. Literally, a sip of Buck's Fizz at Vogue House turned my head forever. It's so funny that here I am back again. My school did a rather dreary annual magazine and the student editors asked me to write about this thing. I produced this unbelievably over-the-top story about my day in the metropolis; that was really the first time my private world collided with my school life. It was an absolute disaster and all the mums of my friends said, 'This boy is a very unwholesome influence', and that was that. So I sort of retreated back into my shell. Quite soon after, we moved back to London. I was very much a country mouse at that point, very inward facing, and I arrived in a school in Highgate with unbelievably sophisticated boys who were in pork-pie hats and two-tone suits and would go to Madness concerts and shag girls from Camden High. I was just so frowsy and out of it. That was a kind of weird period. I was reading in magazines about this exciting New Romantic life that was happening just down the street, and I remember thinking that would be exciting, but I was excruciatingly shy.

Were you bullied?

Quite badly at that school, weirdly because I was quite grown up at that point. Then also because I was a very diligent student, a swot. The first English lesson there I'll never forget. We had been given an assignment over the summer, which I was quite proud of. I thought I had done quite well and the teacher came in and just started berating the class saying, 'If you think this is how you are going to continue the sixth form then you have another thing coming.' He went on and on, and I was a bit crestfallen and then he added, 'Apart from our new student who has really applied himself and understood the assignment.' My life was a misery after that. Then I just learned that I had better compartmentalize my different lives. I was going to Costume Society events and I made sure there was no crossover with school life. All my friends were much older people. I was busy swotting for my principal study English to go to university. I had a horrible relationship with the art teacher, so I went off and did a portfolio on my own, basically, and applied to Saint Martins for a foundation course, and they more or less said, 'Why didn't you apply directly to the fashion department?' They implied that I might be accepted. At the time I was torn between doing costume design à la Piero Tosi, theatre design or fashion. So I thought I should do a foundation course and sort myself out. Meanwhile, the total expectation from school and my dad was that I would go to Oxford and read English. Then I got accepted at Saint Martins. I just thought that university would be a continuation of my school life, which had not been enjoyable at that point, and that Saint Martins might be something different. My parents were dumbfounded. Luckily that was back in the day of government grants [for university students] and I could get in through that process. I will never forget the induction day with all these Sloane-y girls, but then I mentioned Cecil Beaton and everyone knew what I was talking about, and that was incredible. Then I realized that I was suddenly surrounded by some like-minded spirits. Within a few days, I also realized that the life of the party was the fashion department, so dreams of theatre design evaporated at that point. There was a brilliant student called John Galliano who everyone was so excited about. He was the star of his year, a couple of years ahead of me. So I stayed on there to do my fashion course. The whole Saint Martins was just the most liberating thing. Suddenly everyone understood who I was. I

'The next thing I knew, I'm going to Saint Laurent couture shows and meeting the most extraordinary ladies – the ones I'd previously idolized from afar.'

realized that I wasn't just this weird loner, that there was a tribe. It was like the chrysalis shell came off and I came out. Then it was going to the Cha Cha Club[24] and Camden Palace and meeting Leigh Bowery and Trojan, and seeing all these new possibilities. I got on very well with Leigh who called me Miss Beaton funnily enough, because he didn't miss a trick.

What do you think it was about Beaton that obsessed you so?
I think the multitasking, the fact that he dipped into the fashion world and society and wrote these very evocative diaries and wonderfully evocative books and designed and took photographs. It was the fact of these accomplishments in all these fields, and, probably more subliminally at that point, the drive and the productiveness.

direction. She was having none of it. Then, at Saint Martins I found this gaggle of girls who I could be Pygmalion with, and that was exciting, too. Yes, Saint Martins totally turned my world upside down. Because I had just compartmentalized everything. At school, I was going off and seeing John Waters programmes and going to the Scala[26] and seeing Fassbinder films, but I never could have brought any of that into my school life. I was a loner because there was no one else, no kindred spirit at all. Well, certainly none that I found. Funnily enough, the circle of friends at my previous school, whose parents had encouraged them to steer clear of this abomination, all blossomed and flourished in their subsequent sixth form and all very much embraced their sexualities.

Do you think there is something melancholic about clothes that have been worn and treasured? When the person who has worn them is no longer there, they become almost like ghosts in a way.
I don't think about death when I look at old clothes; I think about life and the lives that were led in them. That is why it is so exciting when things come to me with provenance, particularly at this time when more and more people are coming and saying 'I have my mother-in-law's clothes' and that is just so exciting because when you really have a sense of the person whose clothes they were, what their houses looked like, how they lived and entertained and decorated, with their husbands or lovers or partners, I just think that is so potent. You know, being able to flesh

'There was so little separation between my role at *Vogue* and my life. Both folded one into the other. My work represented my interests, and vice versa.'

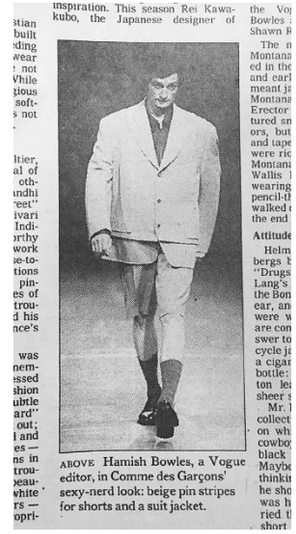
Was the notion of self-invention, the way he remade himself, intriguing to you?
Yes. I particularly love that he lobbied the local authority to have the Sussex Gardens postcode changed from W2 to W1, unsuccessfully, at the age of 12 or something.[25] I can relate to that. I was fiercely snobbish. Not snobbish in a social way, but more about things and people with unusual talent and drive.

Another enduring fascination with Beaton is the coterie, the Bright Young Things. Were you conscious of that?
I was obsessed with all these great beauties of the past, and I was always very envious that Beaton had his sisters Nancy and Baba and he could dress them up and photograph them. My sister resisted any attempt in that

Did you feel destined for greatness at any point?
No, I never thought about anything in a grand plan kind of way at all. There were just the things I was interested in and I found out as much as I could about them. I would say that the *Vogue* talent contest gave me a sense that this could be a career, that there was a life out there. But I didn't really think about it. It just tumbled into place, and the next thing I knew, I'm going to Saint Laurent couture shows and meeting the most extraordinary ladies. It took me a long time to realize – probably in retrospect – that actually my contemporaries and the friends in my circles were every bit as extraordinary as the people in the past who I had idolized. I didn't need to live in the past because the present was just as exciting.

out the story. Quite early on, I had a lot of things that belonged to Aileen Plunket, who was one of the Jazz Age Guinness sisters, who lived and entertained in Luttrellstown Castle, outside Dublin, which was the de facto entertaining house for the Irish government at a certain point. The way she ordered all these clothes in particular colours that were calculated to flatter her looks, and the decor was also designed in the same colour. I met her as well, a fascinating flibbertigibbet, with all these wonderful photo albums that she showed me of all the great Jazz Age figures. It was exciting to see what all these clothes had done, otherwise it was speculation. Just to have a real sense… I mean, she would fly to Paris to have Alexandre curl her eyelashes in the late 1950s.[27] Wild extravagance.

New York, 1993. 'I'm now style editor of American *Vogue* and with fashion editor Phyllis Posnick. The Donegal tweed jacket is by Jasper Conran, the pocket square is Gene Meyer, I believe. I am straining to remember the tie; I certainly still have it as I have never thrown a tie away. I must have hundreds.'



inspiration. This season Rei Kawakubo, the Japanese designer of

ABOVE Hamish Bowles, a Vogue editor, in Comme des Garçons' sexy-nerd look: beige pin stripes for shorts and a suit jacket.

Bowles on the runway for Comme des Garçons menswear, Spring/Summer 1994, in a 'sexy-nerd look' inspired by British artists Gilbert and George, as reviewed by Amy Spindler in the *New York Times*, 6 July 1993.

Bowles on his way to a New York City Opera Benefit party in 1998. 'I am wearing borrowed finery from Jean Paul Gaultier's amazing collection of menswear inspired by iconic mid-century women's haute couture. The tulle skirts of this ensemble, trimmed with pheasant feathers, were inspired by a 1960 Pierre Balmain gown called "Nuit à Chambord". I have the original in my collection.'

Images, top and bottom right: Niall McInerney; Mary Hilliard

Bowles with Anna Wintour at Christie's in London, 1999. 'Anna is wearing Dior haute couture by John Galliano from his *Surrealist* collection. I am wearing a three-piece suit that I had acquired the year before at a Sotheby's sale of the estate of fabled Scottish dandy, the Hon. Neil "Bunny" Roger. Like all his suits, it was made by Watson, Fagerstrom & Hughes, and features antique pressed-metal buttons depicting rabbits.'

Bowles with 'The Hon. Daphne Guinness' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute Benefit, May 2005. The theme was the 'The House of Chanel'.

Left: St. Regis Hotel; Right: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 3 May 2019. 'Stephen Jones is fitting the Swarovski lilac crystal tiara he designed for me to accessorize the ensemble created by John Galliano for Maison Margiela Artisanal haute couture that I wore to the Met Gala, *Celebrating Camp: Notes on Fashion*.'

Images, clockwise from top left: Mary Hilliard; Hamish Bowles Archive; Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images for The Met Museum/Vogue)

You're very precious with your things. I remember the little vignette about you taking care not to expose dresses to the light.

It is just one of those things, you're acquiring and accumulating, and then suddenly you realize in fact you have a collection that needs to be sustained and maintained, and the whole point of acquiring these things is to preserve them and that requires proper infrastructure, climate-controlled spaces, acid-free boxes and paper, and pest-control strategies. It is like a real responsibility.

What did you make of Kim Kardashian in Marilyn Monroe's dress?

There was a prickle down my spine. I mean, I understood the protocols; I knew it was going to be worn for a very finite amount of time.

But Marilyn was sewn into it and then presumably picked out of it. So there must have been something done to that dress that wasn't particularly curatorial.

There was a stole that hid the back, of course, and a very, very dramatic weight loss. And there was a replica to change into for her to actually wear. But yes, I wouldn't be lending something from my collection.

Scandal though that was, it was a huge testament to the iconic power of certain pieces of clothing.

I see the point. You're thinking about an exhibition that celebrates American fashion and what is the most iconic piece of American fashion? Or Franco-American fashion, actually.

I feel like you've met absolutely everybody. Who thrilled you the most?

You know, Leigh Bowery was quite thrilling; I might have been less aware of it at the time, but he had an incredible energy. Izzy Blow was a very thrilling person. I was thrilled to meet people like Madame Grès, Saint Laurent, Cardin, Givenchy. At a certain moment, it was exciting to meet people like São [Schlumberger][28] and Lee [Radziwill] and C.Z.; all these women I had idolized from afar. Anne Bass, Ann Getty, Deeda Blair. Also, to realize how lucky I've been with the people more immediately in my life, my parents – that is ultimately the takeaway, because a lot of these people have very conflicted and difficult relationships with their children. That seems to be a leitmotif with style mavens through the centuries. They are compelled by certain aspects of their lives, and so sometimes their children are a little bit neglected. So I realize that I was very lucky to be dipping into those worlds, but also to have parallel lives.

Your mother sounds absolutely wonderful.

They really broke the mould with her. She was a marvellous person. One takes so much for granted with your parents. I am very much a combination of them. I got theatre, literature, English very much from my father. Mum was a much more intrepid version of me; she certainly had wanderlust, and she encouraged me. There were very strong ideas about style, and about good values and what was real. I sort of realize now how closely I am linked to them.

You talk about style mavens having difficult relationships with their children. There is something generally unkind about the fashion industry.

There are very kind people in it, but it's ruthless on some levels. When I started at Saint Martins, I wanted to become a designer. I spent all my childhood sketching. I have thousands and thousands of fashion sketches and costume designs. I look at them now, and I actually think they are kind of amazing. I was astounded by how prolific I was, and obsessed. But I think it is more interesting to be an observer looking in and understanding very different processes and different designers.

Do you feel like you are the Beaton *de nos jours?*

I don't know if that is for me to say. I mean, there are talents I don't have. I wish I could take pictures and photographs, and I certainly wish I had kept diaries. Although I have every last bit of ephemera, every place card, invitation and so on. All my appointment books – they will be very useful for unravelling things – and there's every Polaroid of every fashion shoot, which mainly involved me standing in for the model, while they had their hair and make-up done. So it's me as Naomi, and Gail Elliot and Cecilia Chancellor and Yasmin Le Bon.

You were showing me things on the board behind you, and I had a little look when you left the room. I was curious as to what your sense of imposing your personality on the magazine actually involves.

'Aileen Plunket, one of the Jazz Age Guinness sisters, would fly to Paris in the late 1950s to have Alexandre curl her eyelashes. Wild extravagance.'

It happens by default. I'm realizing that a large part of this job is constant decision-making – having a response to questions and options that are presented to you all through the day – so it just does have to be instinctive up to a certain point. I didn't set out with some egomaniacal vision but it does become very personal because it is all about one's taste and you are making these judgement calls. They might not always be the right calls, but the buck certainly stops here. When the images come in and you are putting them all together, what sometimes happens is two stories that might have seemed very different in the scouting pictures or your memory of the environments suddenly have a strong resonance between them because of the way they have been photographed. Then one will have to be shunted into a subsequent issue, so that the flow of the magazine is more exhilarating, with a real variety of stories. The July issue, which you see on the boards, lent itself to this formula. There was traditionally an insert called 'The World of Exteriors' in the July issue, but this time we've shaped the whole issue around exteriors. It was challenging because there was no inventory of gardens, but it was quite easy to put in much more editorialized stories, like a portfolio of artists who simulate flowers in wax, ceramic or paper, or a story on an 1850s garden book that was the most expensive example of its kind at the time. There's a story on the artist Pierre Bergian, who evokes these extraordinary rooms, some of them imagined and some storied. He painted his own apartment for our issue, and did some de Chirico-style exterior-scapes. We have been able to use those anchoring stories between more traditional house stories, and so on. So I think there will be more of that moving forward, with profiles and so on. We had Dame Magdalene Odundo[29] in the June 'Art and Antiques' issue as a profile, which was a serendipity because I'd sat next to her at Thomas Dane's gallery opening.[30]

How often does that happen, a random serendipitous connection with someone which then generates the story?
It's funny, things are just in the air. I'd been thinking a lot about Magdalene and then I heard she was going to be part of Thomas Dane's group show, curated around the idea of clay and artists who work in that medium. Her work was juxtaposed with some early Fontana works and it was so poetic in the way it was installed. I was reminded of my great friend [antique dealer] Gordon Watson who had a fabulous apartment in Courtfield Gardens at the end of the 1980s. It made a great impression on me because he had Boltanski works and 1940s French furniture, a rug woven after Cocteau, and this very imposing table with five or six Magdalene vessels arranged on it. Her work was in my mind and when I sat next to her, she said that she considered a *World of Interiors* story on her practice in 1984 as a really significant moment in her career. It put her on the map. With all her other projects going on, including a dedicated space at the Venice Biennale and a lot of attention from the auction houses in her work, I thought it would be interesting to revisit the 1984 issue. We had it in our archives – they are very beautiful pictures – so we went back and did a portrait of her in her studio in Farnham, which we also documented, so we could fold it in. It was a way to relate what was exciting and happening now to the magazine's history in this powerful way. As I said, things are just in the air. Suddenly, three of my revered contributors will come to me and say, 'Oh my god, I have just seen such and such a place and you really have to do something.' That is exciting.

In my experience of *World of Interiors*, its appetite for the arcane was thrilling. Of all the interiors magazines, it was the one where you would go to find, say, a story on William Beckford[31] as opposed to a celebrity apartment. Are you naturally drawn to arcana?
I think I am. As a child, my interests, although they now might seem in some cases commonplace, were certainly esoteric for a boy my age. Some were and are still esoteric. I was mad about Captain Molyneux[32] as a ten-year-old. I just thought it was so fascinating. Now, someone like Captain Molyneux, I think about him through a very different prism. If he had been able to parlay his romantic life and history in the way that became part of Chanel's legacy, he might be a little more remembered.

With such esoteric boyhood pursuits, I need to know whether you also went to *Carry On* movies.
I loved *Carry On* movies! [Mock indignation] In fact, I made a pilgrimage to Kerry Taylor [auction house] to see Babs's towelling bikini, which memorably malfunctioned in *Carry On Camping*. I had a particular soft spot for Charles Hawtrey and Kenneth Williams, for self-evident reasons.[33]

You straddle universes. Coming back to Beaton, I think of him going home at night and making acid observations in his diary about all the failings of everyone he was compelled to spend time with. Being in his world but not of it, in a curious way. When you talk about preferring to be outside looking in, I wonder if you ever felt the same way as he clearly did.
I don't know if this is unusual necessarily, but it is very particular to me. I have always had very much a high-low sensibility, whether it was the Hotel Intercontinental and the Saint Laurent couture show, or RuPaul at the Pyramid Club in the mid-1980s. My life at *Vogue* has always been very much about going to dinner at Deeda Blair's and having a soufflé presented with a ladle of caviar on top that collapses slowly into the souffle as you eat it and having a wonderful time and being saturated in her aesthetics, but then heading downtown and going to the club of the moment until five in the morning…

Don't say the Mineshaft.[34]
I wouldn't say that, no! But whatever it might have been. My first experience of New York was with [jewellery designer] Vicki Sarge[35] who was my roommate at the time. She had been on the door of the Mudd Club[36] and was unusually connected to that world. So I arrived and we had an open sesame to the Mike Todd Room at the Palladium,[37] which had just opened, and Area and Save the Robots and the Pyramid Club, and a party that Madonna would turn up to, all that incredible downtown world. Then the following morning, I would go uptown to Martha's on Park Avenue[38] because I was so fascinated by the women who would be shopping there; they'd be having a trunk show of the collection by a then-emerging Carolina Herrera, which looked like something from *The Women* – and *that* was my fantasy world. Bergdorf or Mortimer's, seeing Mrs Kennedy on the front table, or Betsy Bloomingdale, or Pat Buckley holding court. I was just so enthralled by the wonder of all of it on all levels. My life was just one long pinch-me moment, everything was so exciting, seeing all these people I had seen in the pages of *WWD* come to life, initially from afar, and then in a much more intimate way, even becoming friends with some of them. And similarly in Paris, it was going to clubs like La Nouvelle Eve and Les Bains Douches, and getting into Le Privilège in the basement of Le Palace,[39] and then being invited to São Schlumberger's as a *pic à dents* – or toothpick, meaning you showed up after dinner – where she'd said the dress code was informal, and yet she greeted her guests wearing Colombian emeralds and that Saint Laurent yellow duchess satin jacket with Lesage grapes as epaulettes. Though I do suppose the skirt was a short, not a long one.

And what would you be wearing for that?
I'm wondering what I would have worn for that. I did have a purple Mugler suit that was trellised with chartreuse and I might have brought that out. Or a Gaultier something or other.

Ah, the memory. You were in that Gaultier show in 1989.[40]
I was, I was revelling with Jean Paul and his press officer Lionel Vermeil, who looked like an Otto Dix character with a lot of fox furs and kohled eyes and thin as a whip. He sidled up to me at four in the morning and said, 'Jean Paul is wondering if you'd like to be in his upcoming show.' Of course, my cup literally just ran over. There was a pause for theatrical effect before Lionel added, 'It's based on Weimar lesbians.'

And you were *such* a Weimar lesbian in that show!
That was very fun. I was at *Harpers* and I hadn't told any of the team and they were all panicked that I hadn't been able to make it to the show. It was at the other end of Paris and quite difficult to get to. And then they saw me flouncing down the runway. When I came off, I was told to be slightly less camp and more Weimar lesbian! If you watch the whole thing, I think I was a bit more subdued on my second and third *passage*.

How did your two worlds, high and low, feed each other to make you what you are?
First of all, the *Vogue* world, certainly in the 1990s, was a society that was evolving and so, of course, our focus was on society women who might have been exemplars of part of the 1980s

'Beaton lobbied the local authority to have the Sussex Gardens postcode changed from W2 to W1, unsuccessfully, at the age of 12; I can relate to that.'

'I didn't set out with some egomaniacal vision for *The World of Interiors*, but it does become very personal because it's all about one's taste.'

razzle-dazzle but were now working with God's Love We Deliver or raising funds for the New York Public Library. It was all very philanthropy-based. But you also wanted to know what parties Susanne Bartsch[41] was throwing, who was going to them, what Todd Oldham's apartment looked like in Chelsea, who were the exciting emerging artists. So everything fed how I saw the *Vogue* world, which was uptown and downtown. I am writing a memoir and I actually stop at my lunch with Anna after she offered me the job in 1992. I'd initially planned a much broader sweep but there was so much to write about the 1980s and the cusp of the 1990s, between Leigh Bowery and Princess Gloria TNT and Gianni [Versace] emerging and Karl at Chanel, and Marc [Jacobs] and Isaac [Mizrahi] in New York, and what AIDS and smack addiction did to everyone, and how that recalibrated our world. I got hooked on writing about all those characters and thought maybe I will just save everything else for volumes two and three.

So volume two will presumably be the *Vogue* years. You were brought in to cover interiors. Did you find that honed your interests or did it still allow you to express the breadth of your experience?

It was always unusual, because I brought seven years of fashion life behind me; it was not as though I checked that at the front door. I was also going to shows and profiling designers, so through the years, I kept the day job. I mean, I am still at *Vogue*. There was so little separation between my role at *Vogue* and my life. Everything folded one into the other. My work represented my interests, and vice versa. What was very different, of course, was that I had much more autonomy at *Harpers & Queen* because I was working with a series of editors who were probably more wordsmiths, and I was charged with running the fashion department and covers. So when I came back from the collections, I would say these are the 24 stories we are going to be doing over the next 6 months, and these are the 8 stories that I am going to be doing. Then to come into a very different structure, working with an editor who is extremely focused on every detail, every caption, every pair of earrings that needed to be chosen for a page, it was very different.

A different kind of education?

Yes, it was in a way, because you certainly discovered very quickly the kinds of things that were going to be warmly embraced, the kinds of things that were going to be a tough sell, and those that were never going to make the grade. So that was a recalibration right there. I think I could truthfully say I was very productive.

After so much experience, after acquiring this wealth of knowledge and wisdom, what do you envisage for the future? Do you still see yourself as an observer, or are you now more participant?

Both, I think. I certainly think that *World of Interiors* is kind of the dream because I can find in it so many of my interests and that is really exhilarating. I would also say, moving back to London is really recalibrating my life in a sense. Though Diana Vreeland said that the best thing about London is Paris, you do realize that a lot of places that I love to go are so accessible, especially now as I attempt to claw back some of my weekends.

And you have a new apartment to decorate.

Yes, so I need to travel the world and bring things back for that. I do at some point, in a complementary parallel way, want to focus on my collection and on bringing that to a wider audience, whether that is through books or exhibitions. Or both, ideally. That is a big focus for me, and that will happen totally in parallel to my life here.

You seemed like you were such an old soul as a child. How do you feel now?

I feel very, very young and immature in some ways. I think I lived my life backwards.

Hamish Bowles is Benjamin Button!

I mean in lots of ways, I am hopeless in a childlike way. I can't drive; I can't quite cope with technology. I certainly don't feel the age that my passport tells me. But I have certainly learned from older – sometimes very, very much older – people who I really admire. What kept these people so young was an unquenchable curiosity about the world and life, and what was going on. I think that has always been my thing as well, and that is also what is so exciting about having one foot in the fashion world because it is constantly changing and reflecting a different zeitgeist.

'In many respects, I am hopeless in a childlike way. I can't drive; I can't quite cope with technology. I certainly don't feel the age written in my passport.'

Photography assistant: Jack Tennant. Groomer: Reve Ryu.

1. Dubbed 'one of the monarchs of New York society' by the *New York Times*, C.Z. Guest (1920-2003), née Lucy Douglas Cochrane, married Winston Churchill's second cousin, and became a fashion icon, socialite, equestrian, and gardening expert. Her first book, *First Garden*, featured illustrations by her 'very dear friend' Cecil Beaton and an introduction by her 'dear, dear friend' Truman Capote.

2. Patrick Kinmonth is an opera director, set and costume designer, artist, writer, creative director, and according to Anna Wintour, a 'true Renaissance man'.

3. Directed in 1939 by George Cukor from a screenplay co-written by Anita Loos, *The Women* has a cast of 130 actresses, including Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Paulette Goddard, and Joan Fontaine. It includes a six-minute fashion-show sequence featuring clothing by Adrian during which the otherwise black-and-white film bursts into Technicolor.

4. British fashion journalist and newspaper executive Felicity Green is 95; she once interviewed British prime minister Margaret Thatcher about her fashion passions. Geoffrey Aquilina Ross is a journalist and writer whose book *The Day of the Peacock* recalled London's 1960s fashion scene; he now lives in Malta and writes travel guides

5. David Seidner (1957-1999) was a Los Angeles-born photographer known for his use of dramatic lighting, fragmentation and striking cropping. He began taking pictures professionally after moving to Paris aged 17, and his 1980s work 'greatly influenced fashion photography for over a decade', according to the International Center of Photography.
6. Robert 'Mad Boy' Heber-Percy (1911-1987) was an English eccentric and companion to the equally eccentric Lord Berners from 1932 until the latter's death in 1950. Herber-Percy inherited Berners' estate at Faringdon House, Oxfordshire, and dedicated the rest of his life to running it.

7. 'If an Anglo-Saxon decides to write a personal record of fashion and the minor arts,' begins Cecil Beaton's *The Glass of Fashion*, 'he may find himself accused of being a propagandist of frivolity.' First published in 1954, Beaton's memoir is an ode to serious levity and a plea for clothing to be seen as both as art and a marker of history. It is, he wrote, 'much like ourselves – alternately contradictory and consistent, tragic and comic, compounded of the transitory and the enduring.'

8. Costume designer Piero Tosi (1927-2019) is best remembered for his 15 films with Luchino Visconti, beginning with *Bellissima* in 1951. Renowned for his exquisite commitment accuracy, Tosi would research the details of each costume to ensure its historical faithfulness to the film's timeframe. This obsessive eye for details is embodied in the ball scene that closes *The Leopard* (1963), for which he researched and designed hundreds of 19th-century costumes.

9. Luchino Visconti's *Ludwig* (1973), a biopic of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, known for his architectural and hedonistic extravagance – was the final part of the director's 'German trilogy' after *The Damned* and *Death in Venice*. It starred Romy Schneider and featured costumes by Piero Tosi.

10. In the 1960s, artists' materials company Winsor & Newton produced the *English Historic Costume Painting Book* series. Each volume featured 12 plates of line drawings of the fashion of a historical period (Number 16, for example, covers 1914 to 1936), which readers could colour in.

11. In its 50-year history, Polly Peck went from a fashion label – founded in 1940 by designer Sybil Zelker and her businessman husband Raymond to produce clothes of 'unstudied casualness' – to a huge multinational conglomerate that included tinned-fruit giant, Del Monte. In 1990, its flamboyant owner, British-Cypriot businessman Asil Nadir, was accused of having embezzled £150 million from the company, and it went spectacularly bust. He fled the country in a light aircraft, but returned in 2012 to clear his name. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

12. *Coppélia, ou la fille aux yeux d'émail* is a ballet with music by Léo Delibes and based on a story by E.T.A. Hoffmann, which premiered at the Opéra in Paris on 25 May 1870.

13. Despite writing over 200 books of historical fiction that sold over 100 million copies, Eleanor Hibbert (1906-1993) remained almost completely unknown to the public as she chose to publish under a series of pseudonyms: Jean Plaidy for books about fictionalized European royalty; Philippa Carr for multi-generational family sagas; Victoria Holt for gothic romance; and Eleanor Burford, Elbur Ford, Kathleen Kellow, Anna Percival and Ellalice Tate for crime novels, thrillers and murder mysteries.

14. Pioneering fashion historian and collector Doris Langley-Moore (1902-1989) founded the Fashion Museum in Bath in 1963. Her obituary in the Costume Society's journal, *Costume*, described her 'extraordinarily forceful personality, intellect, wit and powers of observation … Her quarrels were legendary … but so too were her achievements.'

15. Castle Howard was designed by John Vanbrugh, an architect and playwright. Construction begun in 1699, and finished a century later. It was the location for a celebrated 1981 TV adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, starring Jeremy Irons and teddy bear named Aloysius.

16. Ronald Paterson (1917-1993) was a Scottish designer renowned for his skill with heavyweight fabrics, such as tweed. After winning an Elsa Schiaparelli-judged tailoring competition aged 18, he trained and worked in Paris, before returning to London in 1947 and opening a couture house on Albemarle Street that remained open until 1968.

17. Diana Cooper (1892-1986), née Manners, was a socialite and diplomatic 'trailing spouse' who married British politician Duff Cooper in 1919. After a brief period as an actor, she followed her husband on his postings, notably to Paris after World War II, where she saw Dior's New Look show. Her review: 'a whole lot quite unwearable […] the bulkiness of them is too uncomfortable'.

18. Cathleen Nesbitt (1888-1982) was a British actress who worked extensively on Broadway and in films, her last role only two years before her death aged 93.

19. When Julian Mitchell's play *Another Country* opened in the West End in London in March 1982, it starred Rupert Everett and, in his first starring role, Kenneth Branagh. Their understudies were, respectively, Daniel Day-Lewis and Colin Firth.
20. Nicky Haslam is a British designer of interiors and tea towels.

21. The January 1974 issue of *Vogue* had a cover shot by David Bailey in Corsica, styled by Grace Coddington, and featuring Anjelica Huston and – as the first-ever male Vogue cover star – Manolo Blahnik.

22. Costume designer Shirley Russell (1935-2002) worked with her husband Ken Russell and Doris Langley-Moore, created a large costume-hire business, and was nominated for two Academy Awards, for *Agatha* (1979) and *Reds* (1982).

23. Born in 1923, Beatrix Miller was evacuated to Canada aged 15, when war broke out. She returned two years later in a dangerous wartime sea convoy (she later remembered not changing her clothes for the entire 16-day crossing). After the war she worked for the British secret service MI6 in occupied Germany, before beginning in journalism as an editorial secretary at society magazine, *Queen*. She moved to New York to work on *Vogue*, before returning to edit *Queen* in 1958. She became editor-in-chief of British *Vogue* in 1964, working with the biggest names of Swinging London, including Jean Shrimpton, David Bailey, and Terence Donovan. She retired in 1984 and died, aged 90, in 2014.

24.Club night Cha Cha Club took place in a back bar at Heaven in London, every Tuesday night for 18 months in the early 1980s. Entry was £2, but 'nobody paid', according to co-organizer Scarlett Cannon, who told Charlie Porter their reasons for stopping it in 1982: 'We had great, great times, but you know it's coming to an end when you get minibuses coming in from Southend.'

25. The Beaton family moved into 61 Sussex Gardens in February 1926.

26. London rep cinema the Scala opened on Tottenham Street in 1979 and moved to a location near King's Cross Station two years later. By the time it closed in 1993, its founder Stephen Woolley had already become a film producer and been nominated for an Academy Award for Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*.

27. Celebrity hairdresser Alexandre (1922-2008) worked extensively on shows with French fashion designers from Coco Chanel to Thierry Mugler and was unofficial *coiffeur* to the stars and international jet set. He designed Elizabeth Taylor's hair for the film *Cleopatra* (1963).

28. São Schlumberger (1929-2007) was a Portuguese-born socialite, philanthropist, patron and art collector. She was married to French-American oil tycoon Pierre Schlumberger.

29. Ceramicist Magdalene Odundo was born in Kenya in 1950 and moved to the UK in 1971. She is known for her burnished pots, which often recall the human form. She was made a Dame by the Queen in the 2020 New Year's Honours List.

30. *A Matter of Life and Death*, curated by Jenni Lomax, was held at Thomas Dane in Naples, from 29 March-28 May 2022.

31. William Beckford (1760-1844) was a novelist, art collector, patron, critic, travel writer, politician, and slave-holding plantation owner. Aged 10, he inherited £1 million in cash, as well as an estate and a number of Jamaican plantations; by the time of his death, only £80,000 remained.
32. Edward Molyneux (1891-1974) was a British fashion designer who, after being blinded in one eye in World War I, moved to Paris and opened a boutique at 14 Rue Royale. Open from 1919 to 1950 (except during the war), he produced what the Costume Institute calls 'simplistic masterpieces … perfect for the woman who desired to look "absolutely" right'.

33. Between 1958 and 1978, 30 *Carry on…* films were produced, becoming a multi-generational favourite in the UK and remaining a mystery to the rest of the world. The films, which starred a troupe of British comic actors, such as Sid James, Kenneth Williams, Charles Hawtrey, Hattie Jacques and Joan Sims, often parodied other genres (historical epics, horror, soft porn) with a mix of repetitive double entendres and broad physical comedy. The series' most celebrated scene comes in *Carry on Camping* (1969) in which actress Barbara Windsor's pistachio-coloured bikini top flies off her ample bosom during an exercise class and hits Kenneth Williams' gym instructor in the face.

34. Located at 835 Washington Street in Manhattan, Mineshaft was a legendary BDSM gay club open from 1976 to 1985. It was renowned for its strict rules that banned rugby shirts, designers sweaters, disco drag, suits, and, most importantly, 'colognes or perfumes'.

35. Vicki Sarge is a jewellery designer and founded the brand VICKISARGE in 2013.

36.Open from 1978 to 1983, the Mudd Club was a club-gallery space at 77 White Street in New York. The 'Mudd Club meant something,' Tim Blanks wrote in the *New York Times* in 2001, 'freedom, opportunity, subversion, all cosseted by the nurturing insularity of a genuine underground scene, perhaps the last real one New York had.'

37. The Michael Todd Room was the upstairs VIP space at the cavernous and stunning Arata Isozaki-designed Palladium club at 126 East 14th Street in New York. The room was decorated with murals by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Francesco Clemente, Kenny Scharf and Keith Haring, which were lost when New York University tore down the building and replaced it with student housing.

38. Martha, at Park Avenue and 58th Street in Manhattan, was run for almost 60 years by Martha Phillips, a boutique owner who did not ask her rich, socialite customers what they wanted but rather, noted the *New York Times*, 'told them what they should have. More often than not, they listened'. Asked in 1983 at age 85 why she continued to work, she replied: 'I like the excitement.'

39. The Privilège was a private space underneath Paris nightlife Mecca Le Palace. Reserved for the club's VIP clientele, it was a restaurant until midnight when it transformed into an intimate disco. The door was managed by Parisian legend Jenny Bel'Air.

40. The show was Jean Paul Gaultier, Autumn/Winter 1989, *Women Among Women*.

41. Susanne Bartsch arrived in New York in 1981 and opened a shop on Thompson Street, Soho, that specialized in the rising British fashion designers of the time. She also set about becoming the queen of the night and is today a legendary club promoter, curator of young cultural talent, fundraiser for AIDS research, and a wearer of fabulous costumes.

‘I don’t think big. I think *huge*.’

CEO Pietro Beccari on his mission to make Dior more, more, more.

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield
Photographs by Juergen Teller; creative partner Dovile Drizyte

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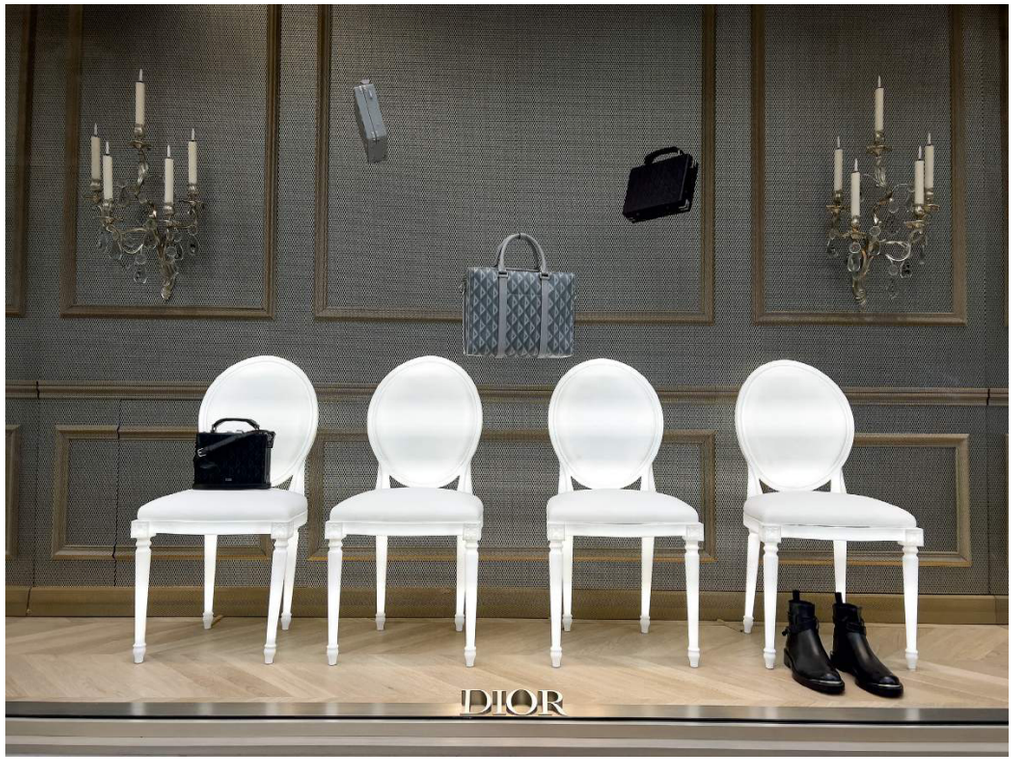
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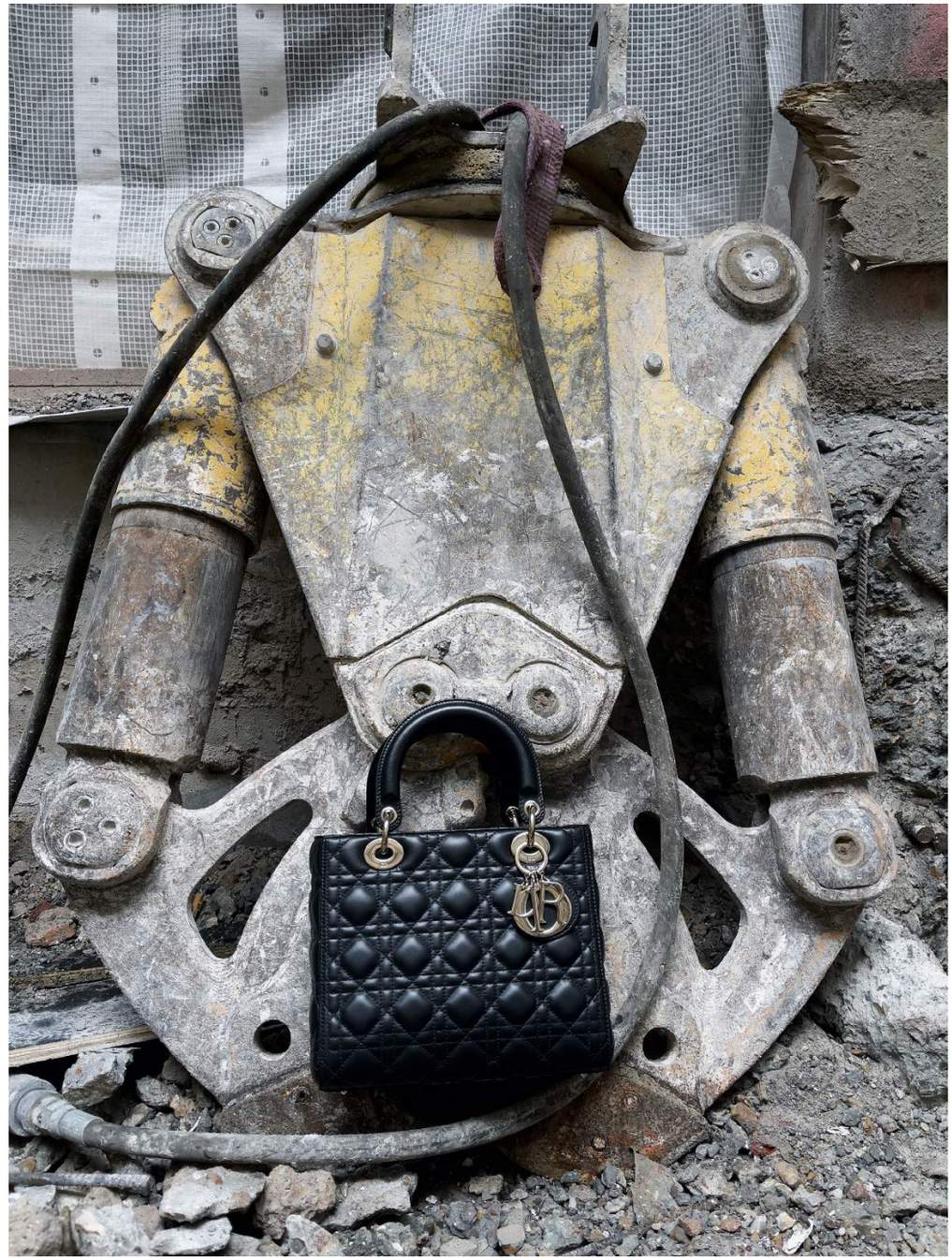

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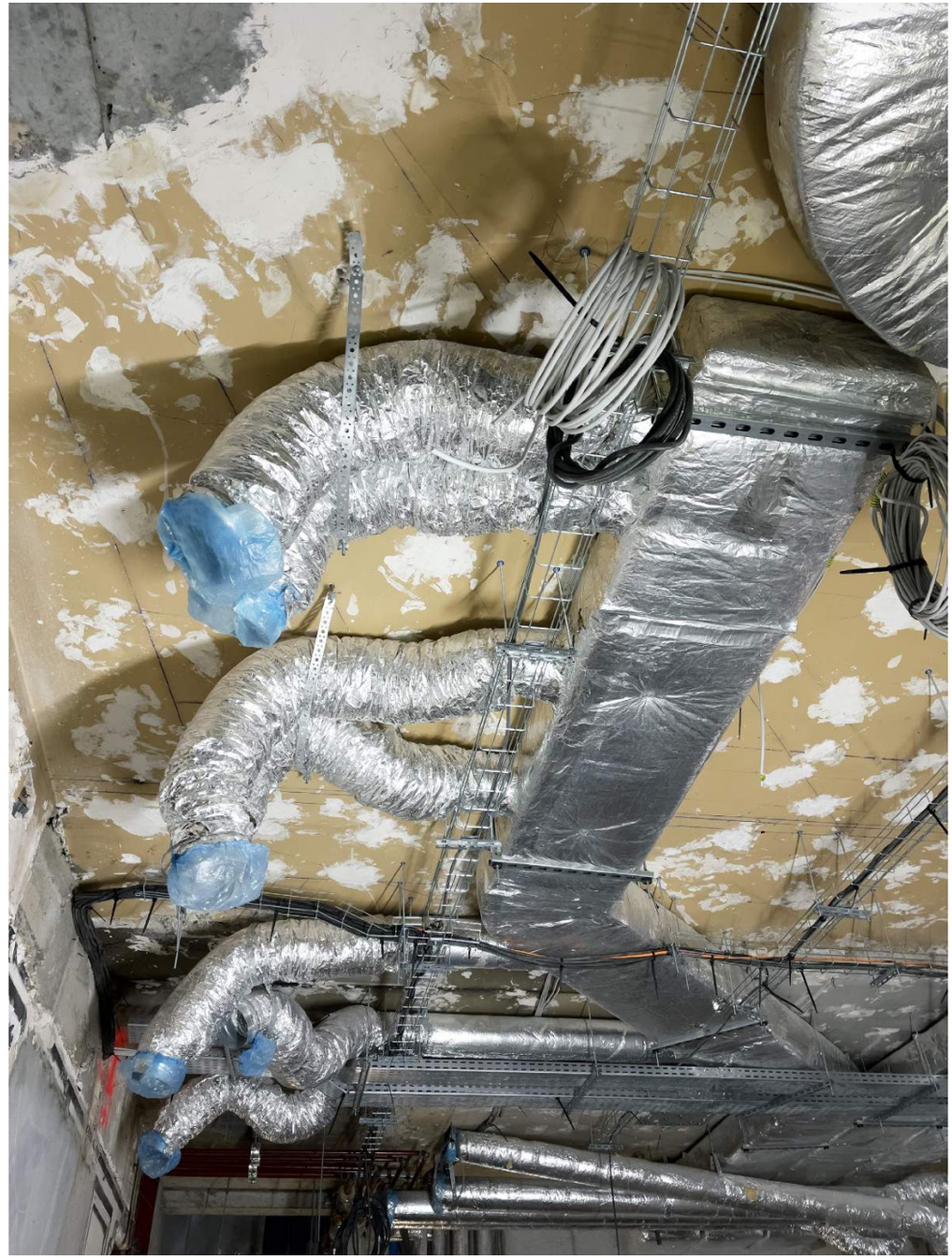

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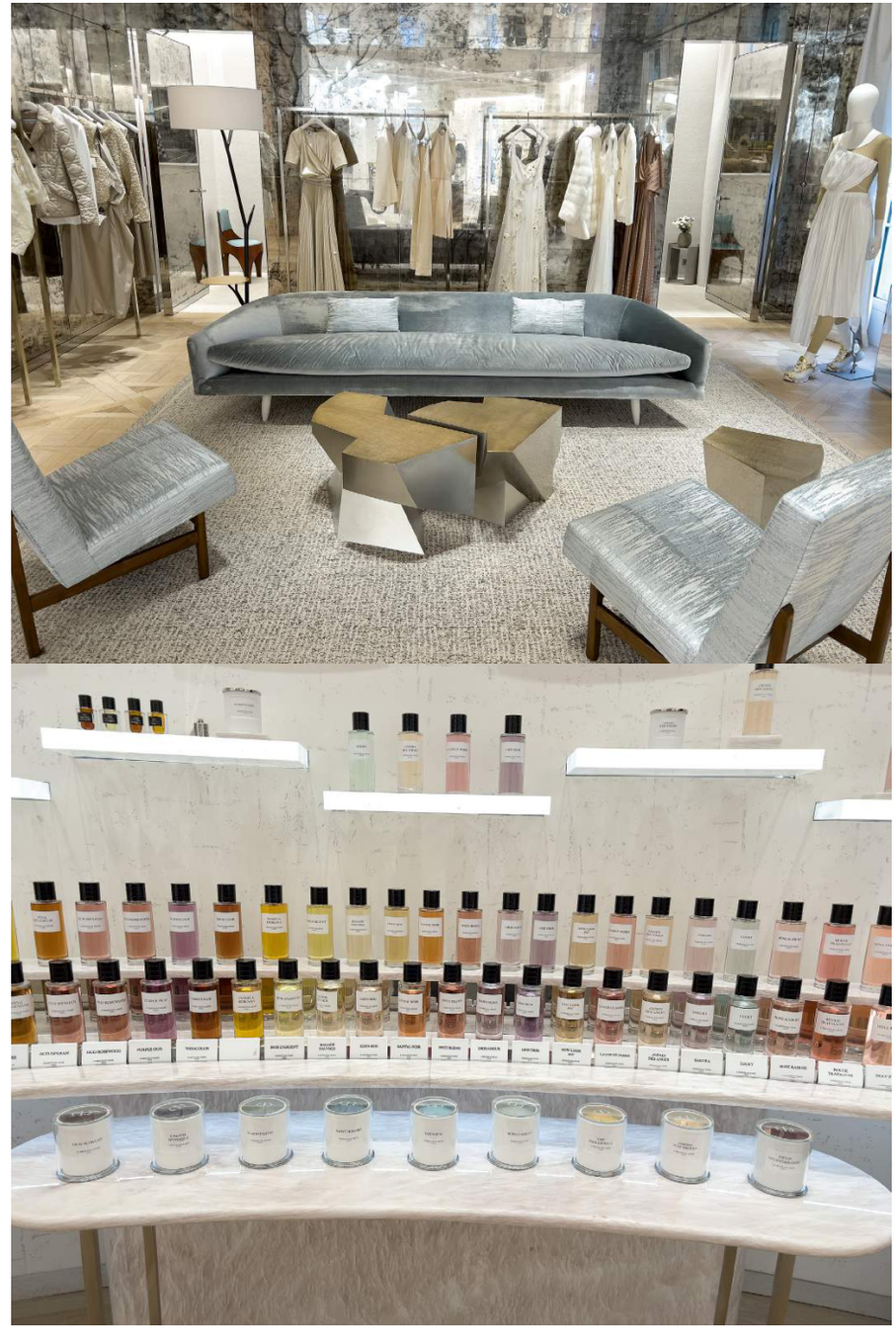
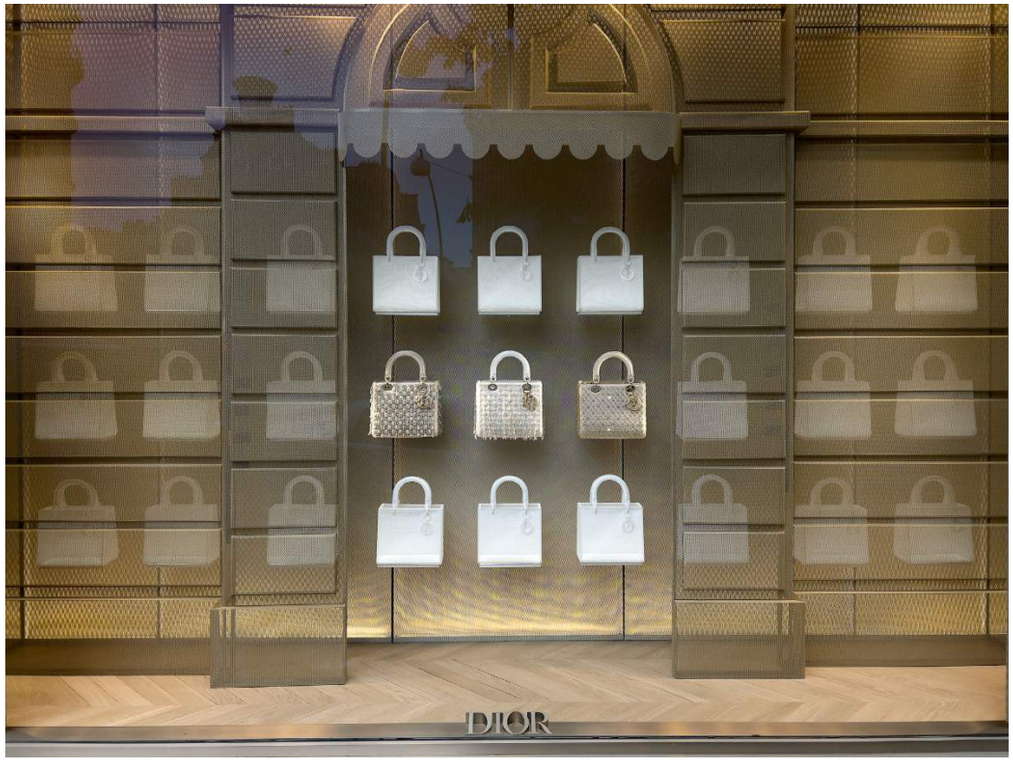




Styling by Jean-Michel Clerc. Models: Ruth Bell at Elite, Selena Forrest at Next, Sora Choi at Ford, Essoye Mombot at Oui Management.
Hair: Caroline Schmitt at Art+Commerce. Make-up: Jindian Yang at Art+Commerce, Elodie Barrat. Nails: Nelly Ferreira. Photography assistants: Tarek Cassim, Tom Ortiz, Clément Dauvent. Hair assistant: Hyacintha Faustino. Nails assistant: Delphine Aissi. Post-production: Catalin at Quick Fix Retouch

'It had to be 30 Montaigne,' Christian Dior wrote in his memoirs about the *hôtel particulier* in Paris's eighth *arrondissement*. 'I would set up here or nowhere else.' So, on 16 December 1946, with Paris still recovering from wartime hardship, the designer opened his label in the townhouse, elegantly renovated with pearl-grey walls, multiple chandeliers, and, as he wrote, a 'flood of small palms'. Just two months later, the clothes that revolutionized post-war fashion would emerge from 30 Montaigne's three ateliers – two *flou* for soft fabrics and one *tailleur* for suits – when Dior showed his New Look.

Over 75 years later, Dior's 30 Montaigne has undergone another renovation. This one is the dream of Pietro Beccari, who joined the house as CEO from Fendi in 2018. Beccari is known for his ability to marry audacious marketing-led ideas with grounded business decisions – in the last two years Dior has seen revenues nearly double – but the crowning achievement of his ambitious vision is the total transformation of the building so beloved by Christian Dior. Opened in March 2022 – 'only four months late' despite Covid, Beccari says proudly – the project can be seen as a confident bet on the continuing importance of 'experiential retail' in an era of booming e-commerce and social-media virality. In the gargantuan 30 Montaigne boutique, menswear and womenswear have a wing each, while homeware, jewellery, shoes, and beauty each has a dedicated space. The building also houses the Monsieur Dior restaurant and a Dior café, which sells a cake named after the designer himself. There's even a private penthouse suite for VIP customers, offering 24-hour access to the store, personal shoppers, and chefs.

Then, there's La Galerie Dior, a spectacular 2,000-square-metre constantly evolving exhibition space that explores Christian Dior's savvy business mind and pioneering fashion vision, and how that has been interpreted by his six womenswear successors: Yves Saint Laurent, Marc Bohan, Gianfranco Ferré, John Galliano, Raf Simons, and Maria Grazia Chiuri. The gallery's sheer grandeur, splendour and size has already made it a landmark on the Parisian tourist trail.

Beccari recently took *System* for a stroll through 30 Montaigne where he discussed overseeing the project's construction during lockdown, his first ever meeting with Bernard Arnault, and what it means to 'dream Dior'. Meanwhile, photographer Juergen Teller shot a portfolio of pictures that captures the space both during construction and upon completion.

Jonathan Wingfield: Was the complete renovation and entire rebirth of 30 Montaigne already underway when you became CEO of Dior in 2018 or did you initiate the project?

Pietro Beccari: I initiated it. Construction started very soon after I arrived at Dior. When you take over a brand, you have 100 days to get your best ideas into place, and this one came pretty much immediately. The most difficult part was telling Monsieur Arnault that it would mean closing Dior's number-one best-performing store in the world; moving the haute-couture ateliers and the haute-couture *salon*, which have been here since 1947; and the offices that housed 450 team members, without actually knowing where I was going to relocate them.[1] Sometimes you have to decide without too much calculation, and believe in your gut instinct. I went to see Monsieur Arnault and I found in front of me not the man that everyone knows – a finance guy, and a super-smart mathematician – but rather his version of Erasmus.[2] He held any craziness inside and said, 'Let's just do it!' He became my partner in crime. Of course, it was months and months of preparation: we had to design the temporary store and find an alternative location, which was the Champs-Élysées; we had to start designing here, and request all the construction permits. Ultimately, we had to implement the entire project in only two and a half years. The building is 13,600 square metres and this was all done during the Covid pandemic, so we did something astonishing in a very short time.

'The most difficult part was telling Monsieur Arnault that it would mean closing Dior's number-one best-performing store in the world.'

What prompted your plans in those first 100 days?

You try to make a difference and you try to add your stone to the building. Dior was and is already a fantastic brand, so I started wondering how I could do more. This location seemed so important, its history, the fact we are at the heart of where everything started. I had this intuition that it could be the chance to do something that had never been done before. I wanted to create a paradise for the senses, a lunar park of experiences, something never seen before. I thought that would really make the difference for Dior, and looking at the first results I am comforted that it does.

When conceptualizing the project, which came first, the idea of upgrading and expanding the store or introducing the museum?

Both together. Just doing a beautiful new store? So what. To create this *ensemble*, that was the idea – an idea that came to me in the room where Monsieur Dior had started dressing the mannequins. It had become a stockroom where everybody would throw things when they did not know where else to put them. So they showed it to me and said, 'Here is where everything started.' Something clicked and I said, 'What the hell, no one has ever seen this, and no one will ever have the chance to see it, because now it is just a cabinet where things get put. Maybe we should do something, open the wall and link it to the project of the new store.' When I arrived at Dior, there was already a project underway to put the Dior Man store back where it used to be, on Rue Francois 1er. I remember the day I went down to the people in that department, and I said, 'Hello guys, put your hammers down, we are going to change everything. We aren't going to do it like this, but like that!' Then the whole thing started.

You mentioned that much of the project was constructed during the pandemic. To what extent did this affect both the project and Dior's growth in broader terms?

Firstly, the pandemic didn't stop the project nor did it affect the company's growth. In fact, the Covid year was an exceptional one for Dior; we did double-digit growth versus 2019.[3] We were the only company accelerating instead of slowing down. We saw the curve coming, and you can't just slow down, you have to accelerate and try to maintain a strict speed. In July 2020, we had our biggest results in our history in terms of turnover. So there was no discussion about stopping the project. In fact, the construction company working here chose to stay at home, but we sued them because they had no right to do that, as construction sites were not legally halted. I asked them to come back because I absolutely wanted to complete this project. It was supposed to be for 2021, but ended up being only four months late, in 2022.

'The construction company working on 30 Montaigne chose to stay at home, but we sued them because they had no right to do that.'

The years you worked at LVMH prior to Dior – firstly at Louis Vuitton in marketing, and then as Fendi CEO – were largely defined by your vision and skill at branding, marketing and communications. So when you arrived at Dior, what was lacking in terms of brand coherence?

It's difficult to say. Sidney Toledano had done a fantastic job.[4] His situation was very difficult, because Dior had been such a licensed brand and he had to stop all the licences and the franchises, and bring it all back together. He started building the first incredible location, this fantastic location for Dior. He had issues with the creative side, with John [Galliano]; he went through that hard time.[5] When I arrived, I found a fantastic company and a fantastic base on which to build the next phase. A brand like Dior is built over time, over 75 years, brick after brick. I wanted to build a new chapter in its history on that beautiful base. It was my time to start doing things, and while it has only been four years, we have done lots of things. We have three fantastic creatives in Maria Grazia, Kim – I first hired him at Vuitton, and I wanted to have him here – and Victoire de Castellane. I have a fantastic dream team, which is not always easy to handle because they are big characters and they have strong ideas. I have a strong character, too. But I think the brand's positioning has been based on the idea that I share with these three artistic directors. Dior is the king of dreams, and we are the only brand that was founded on a dream. The likes of Chanel and many others have a great position in the market, but they're different to ours. My motto when I first arrived here – and it still is – is 'Dreaming Dior'. We don't need to invent things, but rather go back to Dior's original positioning: the dream. The store we're sitting in right now is all part of that dream.

Looking through the archives in the museum yesterday, it struck me that Monsieur Dior was both a creative visionary and a very astute businessman. Launching the fragrance at the same time as the haute couture, opening up so soon in North America, and so on. What do you think he would have made of this latest incarnation?

I don't know what he would have thought about his kingdom being run by someone from a small village in the province of Parma! But I think he would

Introduction text: Daphne Milner.

be very, very happy about 30 Montaigne being integrated into the boutique. Part of his legacy was buildings; there are six buildings here. He started with this white one that you see there, this *hôtel particulier*, and he enlarged it because he was a good businessman. I think he would have been proud that they have been brought together finally, because he wanted this unity. Now 30 Montaigne is inside the store, and I believe that would make him very, very happy. Plus, Monsieur Dior was a true *gourmand*. There is a picture of him in the restaurant here; he liked desserts; he published a recipe book. So that also would make him happy. He now has a cake named after him: the Pâtisserie Dior. This is the packaging [shows sumptuous box], which I think costs more than the cake itself![6] [Laughs]

I wanted to ask a few questions about your own back story and trajectory. Firstly, when you were at school, were you a grade-A student, a slacker, or a rebel?
I was a pretty good student, but not excellent. As a teenager, I was a football player. I played professionally in the second division until the age of 18. My life as a student was very particular because I was living in a small village, taking the bus to school every morning at 7am, studying until 2pm, then straight to the field for training, getting home at 7pm, and going to bed at 8pm, before waking up the following morning to take the bus again. It was hectic, but it really forged my character.

That must have taken a great deal of self-motivation.
It was not an easy life for five years, but it built my inner strength for sure. I was also in the national under-17s team; I was pretty good.

Who was your footballing hero?
At the time I was really passionate about Diego Maradona – he is the greatest of all time.

This must have been when he was playing for Napoli.
Yes, in the 1980s. Arrigo Sacchi was head coach for Parma, before he went on to win the Champions League with AC Milan, and he was my trainer at the time.[7] He actually sent me a book the other day, and in it he wrote, 'Neither of us were good enough football players but we both chose plan B and finally it shows that plan B was the right one for both of us, and it worked out very well.' I wrote back saying, 'You might not have been a good football player, but I was, and you were the one who kicked me out the team without justification!' [Laughs]

He shattered your dream!
I decided to stay in my little village and continue to study at the University of Parma, where I was a pretty mediocre student. Then I started working in Milan, before going to the USA and then to Germany, where I lived for 10 years. One day I was called out of the blue by Yves Carcelle who asked me to run the communications and marketing at Louis Vuitton. I hadn't bought any luxury products up to then in my life.

What had been your relationship with consumerism up until then?
I hadn't had *any*. Honestly. I was working at [chemical and consumer-goods multinational] Henkel, and living in Düsseldorf; we had a good lifestyle, but I didn't know anything about contemporary art or luxury. When I came to Louis Vuitton, Monsieur Arnault, and Yves Carcelle told me, 'Your life will change. Not only because you have a new job, but because you will be confronted by new experiences, your tastes will change because you will meet so many incredible people.' I could barely comprehend what they meant.

What do you think they saw in you?
I think they probably saw someone very authentic and very genuine with good dynamism and a willingness to always surpass himself.

When I interviewed Monsieur Carcelle 10 years ago, he said he'd been born with an entrepreneurial spirit, and that when he was at school, he was already buying marbles, and selling them for twice the price. Did you have any similar young entrepreneurialism?
My father was travelling a lot when I was young, and he'd always bring back souvenirs – something from his trip to Japan, for example. I ended up organizing all these souvenirs and opening a sort of museum in my house for my village friends. They all had to pay to see these souvenirs. The other thing was that I started a business trading rare Panini football stickers. I had a collection and I started getting in touch with people in Parma to sell Panini to get some money. I did have an entrepreneurial spirit, but I didn't know I was going to become a business leader. As I said, I only wanted to become a football player.

'I had an entrepreneurial spirit as a kid, but I didn't know I was going to become a business leader. I only wanted to become a football player.'

And when that dream was gone?
I still played football in the amateur leagues just to earn some money to pay for my studies, but I soon got fed up with university; I wanted to open a store selling sports clothes and football boots. That was my dream, to be honest with you. Then all of a sudden, I was hired by this multinational company, Benckiser, and I discovered a whole new world. I learned about marketing, which I'd barely studied at university, where I'd been doing banking. I quickly discovered that I had a real talent for marketing. Around that time, I started working for this one company, Mira Lanza [detergent manufacturers], which was owned by Benckiser, and I learned that these companies were led by incredible people. Jean-Christophe Babin, who is now the head of Bulgari, was my first boss; he hired me. I used to look at him, like this mega-manager of marketing with the beautiful car and the beautiful wife, the Bang & Olufsen – this was my new benchmark. Then, step by step, I met incredible people along the way; Monsieur Arnault and Monsieur Carcelle are the two people who changed my life the most in terms of luxury. Over the years, I've had offers to go back and be the CEO of big companies, but I couldn't go back to mass market.

This 30 Montaigne project was an audacious move, and it has undoubtedly been risky. Are you a risk-taker by nature?
Risk-taking is part of being an entrepreneur; you *have* to take risks. During Covid we kept investing when the world was stopping – that was a risk. I don't know the biggest risk I took, but I've always taken them. In the mid-1990s, I helped organize a tournament at Giants Stadium in New Jersey, with Benfica, Real Madrid, Parma, and the US national team. I took the risk of putting a lot of money into a football tournament because I thought people would come to the stadium. We had more than 30,000 spectators every day for four days, and we made a lot of money. We probably made more money with that one event than Parma ever did! That was the first risk in my career; I was very young, around 38. Since then, I have taken a lot of risks with every company I've worked for: the runway show on the Trevi Fountain with Fendi; moving Fendi into Palazzo della Civiltà, the old Mussolini building, when everyone in Rome said we were crazy.[8] We had to go to the parliament to convince people, and now it has become the symbol of Fendi's renaissance. I've always tried to find ways to put myself into risk-taking positions, but I like to come out winning in these challenges. This was another example, with Covid, when we took the decision to do this. By the way, Monsieur Arnault never asked me how much it would cost, but it was a lot of money and Dior was much, much smaller than this, so technically it could not have afforded this. We are part of a group, so if we failed, it could have been a huge problem for Dior, and if we had not grown as fast as we have over the past years, it would have been out of proportion. It seems completely natural now; it felt much less so four years ago.

What was the first thing you wanted to do when you arrived at Dior?
With the potential of both menswear and cosmetics, I thought we should make €10 billion as soon as possible. That's the first thing I wanted to achieve.

Have you achieved that?
I cannot tell you, but you can read the evaluation made by certain analysts that says Dior has surpassed €10 billion.

Can you describe the first time you met Monsieur Arnault?
I remember it perfectly. I was staying over the road at the Plaza Athénée hotel. The meeting was at 9.30 in the morning. I was taking a shower at 8 o'clock when his assistant called me and said, 'Monsieur Arnault is waiting for you; you have to come immediately.' You never say no to him! So I got dressed and rushed over to his office across the street, still with wet hair. We went downstairs and he took me on a tour around the Louis Vuitton store and said to me, 'If you don't feel something inside you then just say no, but perhaps you feel a passion about all these incredible artisan-made products.' Then he said, 'Luxury is about emotion. If you don't feel that emotion, then stay where you are.'

To manage a company like Dior, does it have to become a total obsession?
Yes, you *have* to be obsessed.

'The first thing I wanted to achieve when I got to Dior was to transform it into a €10 billion company as soon as possible.'

Are you thinking about it 24 hours a day, waking up in the middle of the night?
Absolutely. Ask any of my team – I normally answer my emails at the speed of light, within 50 seconds of receiving, night or day. You *have* to be obsessed. I don't know, but probably because I consider myself to be less intelligent than many others, so I try to cover it up with a lot of work, a lot of willingness, and being there all the time. I know only this way; it is more than a job, the job is part of your life, and your life is part of the job. The boundaries are very thin. To do what we do with this responsibility, we have to be aware of what is going on everywhere. I don't know any other way to manage a company than being obsessed.

Given the speed at which you make important decisions, are there times when you've thought to yourself, 'If I'd had more time to reflect on that, I would have done it differently'?
No. I am very instinctive, and I am also under pressure – and under pressure you create diamonds. If you have the luxury of time, then you think and you rethink and don't do what you need to do. That has never been my philosophy.

You mentioned before about working with high-profile creatives such as Victoire, Kim and Maria Grazia. What sets creative people apart from the CEO?
First of all, they are all different from one another; they are very special people, each with a very different sensibility. We kind of create heroes of them, and sometimes it is easy for them to lose touch with reality as they live in this creative world and are under pressure to create collection after collection after collection. They are always trying to surpass themselves; they have this incredible sensibility, and they all need to live with this in their own particular way. CEOs are the ones with more contact with reality, which means dealing with your 10,000-strong family, as we have working at Dior, and you need to prosper economically, which has to support the huge investment we are making in creative talent, and with big fashion shows, and with beautiful stores. In the stores we are showing everything possible to maximize everything the creatives are doing. They need to be able to sometimes isolate themselves from reality in order to exist in another world where they need to keep creating and inventing.

Would you say that your role is about keeping them dreaming and creating?
Yes, we have to protect them so they are free to create as much as possible, to do the collaborations and keep their sense of provocation. I have to have the courage with them to say, 'Let's do this', and then decide with them what is realistic. It is a difficult equilibrium to find, but the basis of this equilibrium is what decides the success or if you are going to the wall. That's why the relationship between the CEO and the creative teams is fundamental.

This project is clearly founded on creating great brand equity, while forging financial growth. Would you say that a company experiencing great sales but diminishing brand equity is in a more precarious situation than a brand with great brand equity but reduced financial results?
I don't know if Dior is one of those brands at the moment. I think there are about four brands – don't ask me to name them, you know them better than me – that have this kind of 'sacred' image that crosses time, because of the history and the mythology surrounding them. I think Dior is one of them. Dior's brand equity will always remain, and the challenge is to maintain the economic growth that mirrors its incredible brand image. If I had to choose another brand whether high or low, I would choose a brand with high brand equity because I know what to do with marketing to make them work! [Laughs]

Lastly, this might seem an absurd question to ask a CEO, but is there a time when big becomes *too* big? When could Dior's sheer scale have an adverse effect on that intangible value of the brand?
That is a question Mr Arnault and Michael Burke ask themselves everyday concerning Louis Vuitton, because it is difficult to imagine a limit to Louis Vuitton. If we keep doing a good job and delivering great results, then we can always keep dreaming at Dior. We do not know the limit of our exercise and the potential is pretty unlimited when you think about the middle classes coming up in places like Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Korea. I think these middle classes are looking forward to having their reward, their piece of luxury, whether that's a vacation or a piece of the legend of Dior. So, you know, I don't think big – I think *huge*.

'I consider myself to be less intelligent than many others, so I try to cover it up with a lot of work, a lot of willingness, and being there all the time.'

1. When the label opened in December 1946, 80 people worked for Christian Dior at 30 Avenue Montaigne.

2. Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) was a Dutch humanist theologian and philosopher. Considered the greatest scholar of the northern Renaissance, he was known for his calls for reform, both in education and the Catholic Church, and his powerful criticism of ecclesiastical abuses was important to the Reformation. He is today seen as a champion of liberty over orthodoxy.

3. Christian Dior's revenue and profit figures are difficult to verify as they are published as part of the overall accounts of the label's owner, LVMH.

4. Sidney Toledano was at Christian Dior from 1994 to 2018, first as director of the leather-goods division, then as managing director of international development, and, from 1998, as the house's chairman and CEO. He is now chairman and CEO of LVMH Fashion Group.

5. John Galliano was creative director of Dior from October 1996 to March 2011. He was sacked by Toledano after being accused of twice using anti-Semitic insults in a Parisian café, for which he received a €6,000 suspended fine from a French court in September 2011.

6. Costing €20 when eaten at 30 Montaigne's café, the Pâtisserie Dior is the creation of French celebrity chef Jean Imbert. The chocolate cake with vanilla cream is shaped like a star, because Christian Dior saw the form as lucky after tripping on a metal star on his way to meet his future business partner on 18 April 1946.

7. Widely considered one of football's most tactically innovative coaches, Arrigo Sacchi twice managed AC Milan (1987-1991; 1996-1997), winning the league and back to back European Cups. He also coached the Italian national side, taking it to the final of the 1994 World Cup Final, where it lost to Brazil on penalties. After being accused of racism for comments made in 2015, he clarified his position with *La Gazzetta dello Sport* on 16 February 2015: 'I only said that I saw a game with a team that fielded four Black boys. My history speaks for itself: I have always coached teams with Black champions and I bought many of them, both in Milan and Madrid. I just wanted to point out that we are losing pride and national identity.'

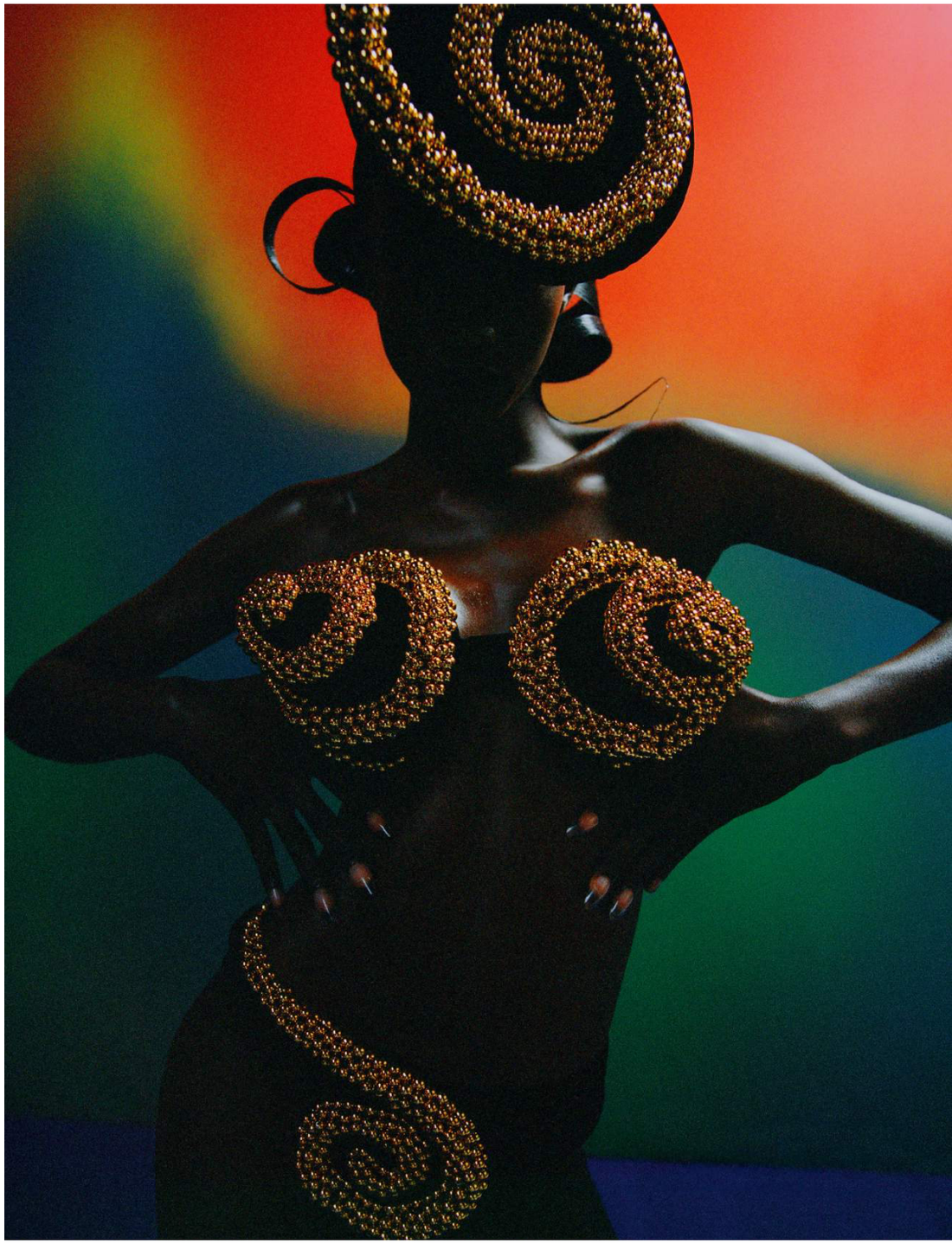
8. After contributing $2.4 million to the Trevi Fountain's restoration, Fendi staged its Autumn/Winter 2017 haute-couture show at the Roman landmark, placing a curved glass runway across the basin to create the illusion that the models were walking on water. In November 2015, Fendi moved its headquarters into the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, a Fascist-era monument in the EUR district of Rome that had stood empty for 40 years. The square building with its facade of 216 arches was designed for the 1942 Universal Exposition in Rome (which never took place), but was not completed until after the Second World War.

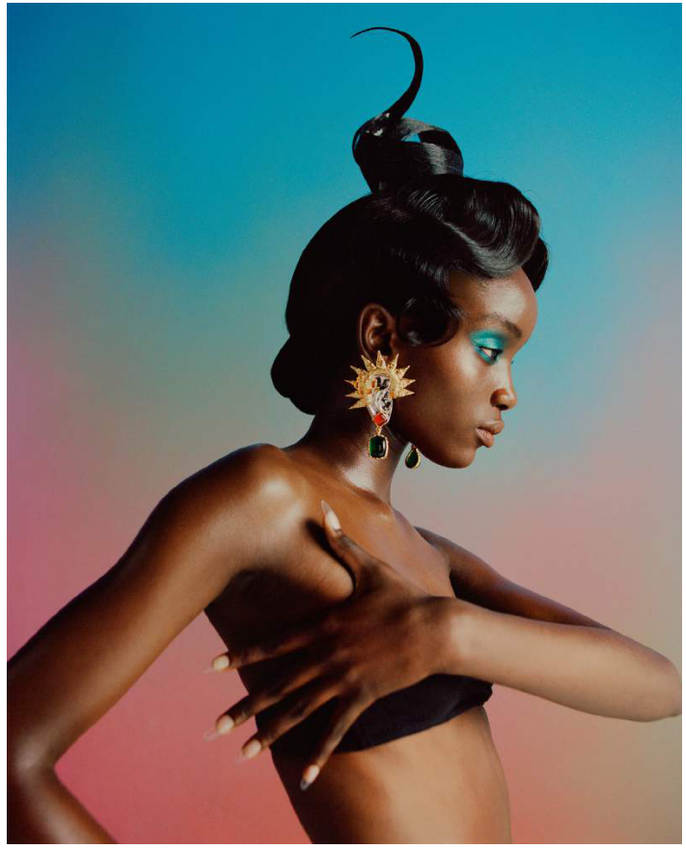
BALENCIAGA

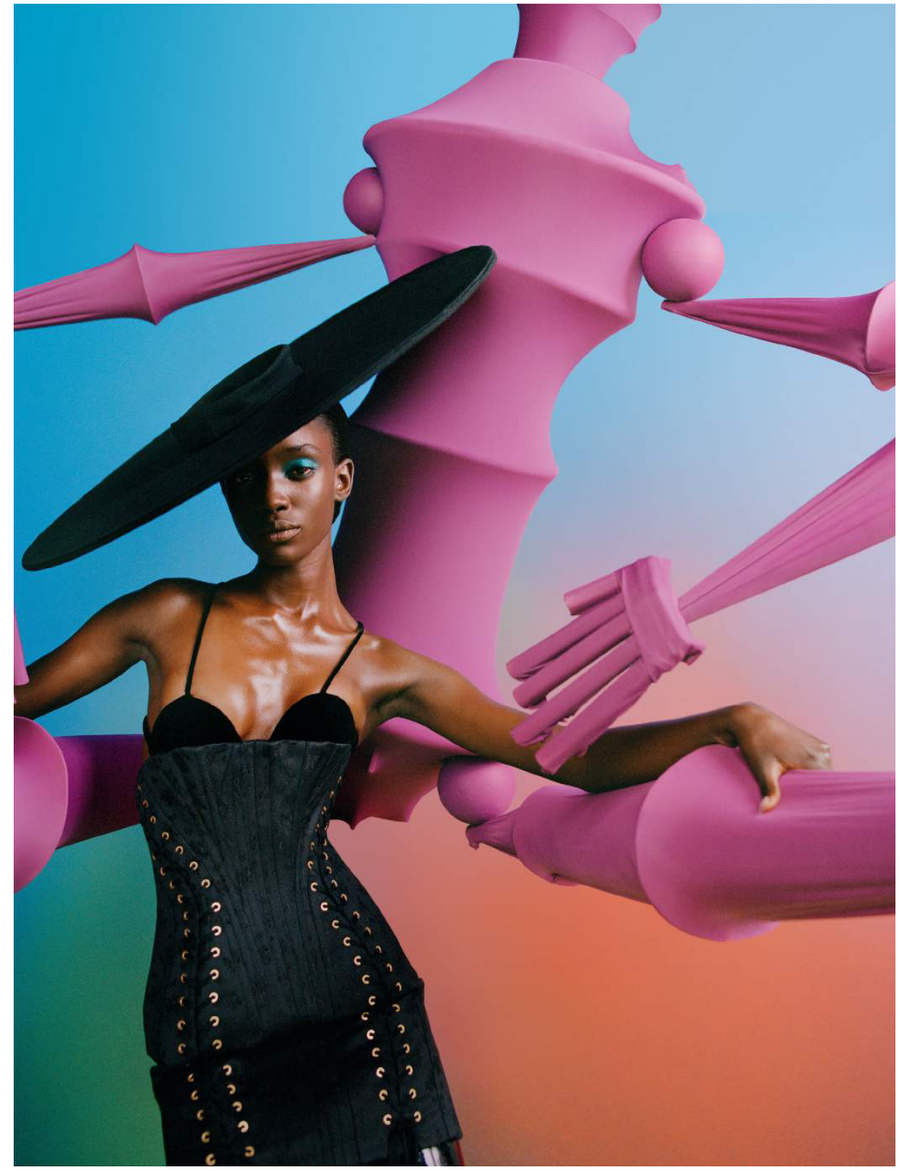
‘Everyone processes their rebellion in a different way.’

Daniel Roseberry’s own coming-of-age tale is bringing dramatic surrealism back to the house of Schiaparelli.

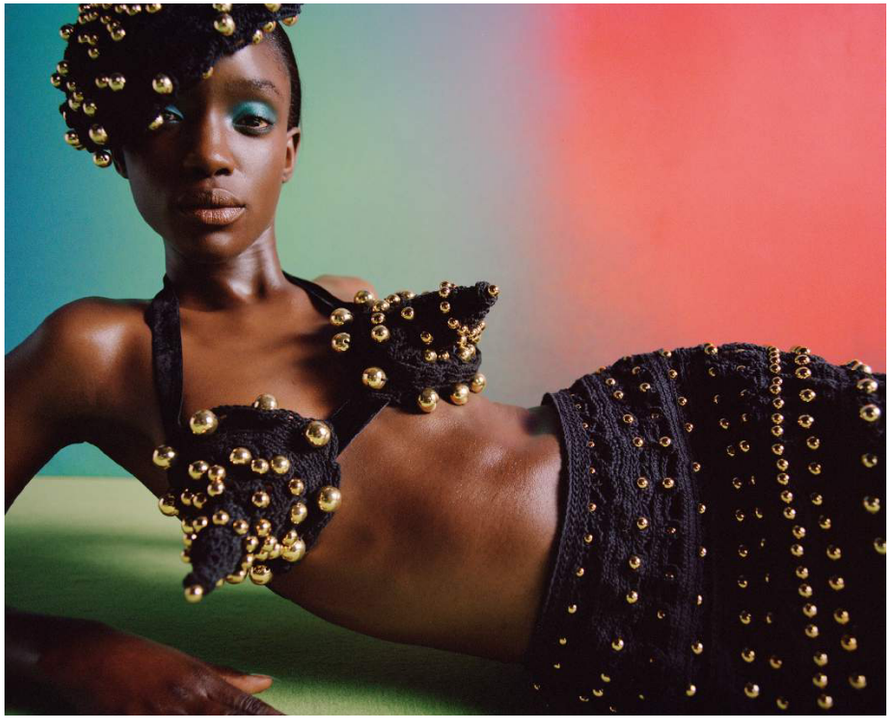
Interview by Jerry Stafford
Photographs by Nadine Ijewere
Styling by Nell Kalonji
Portrait by Christophe Coënon

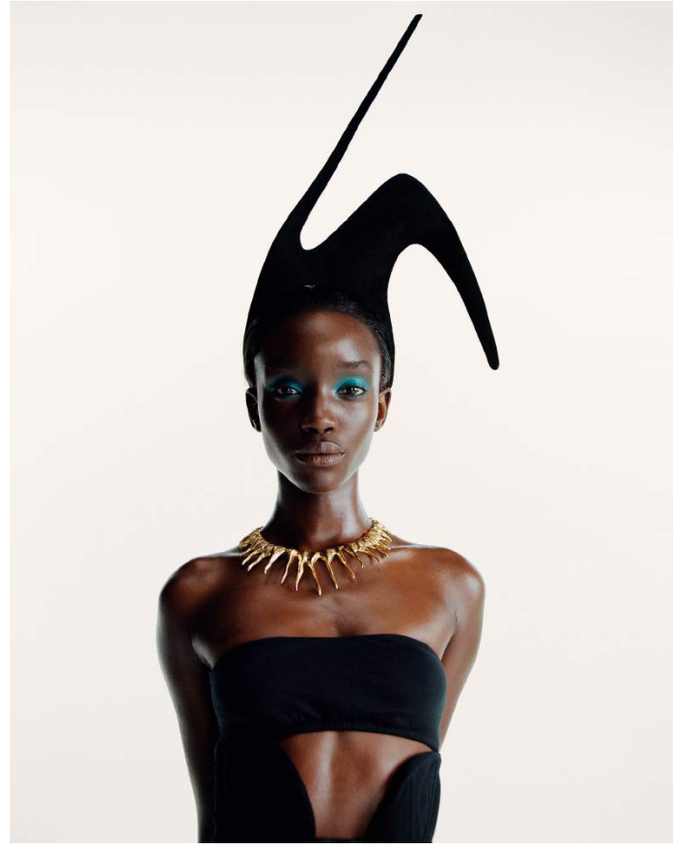


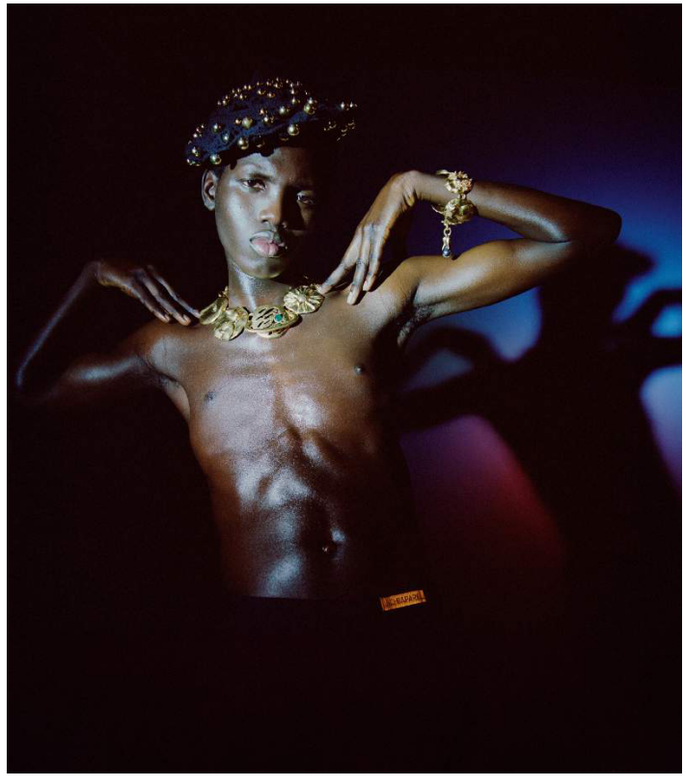


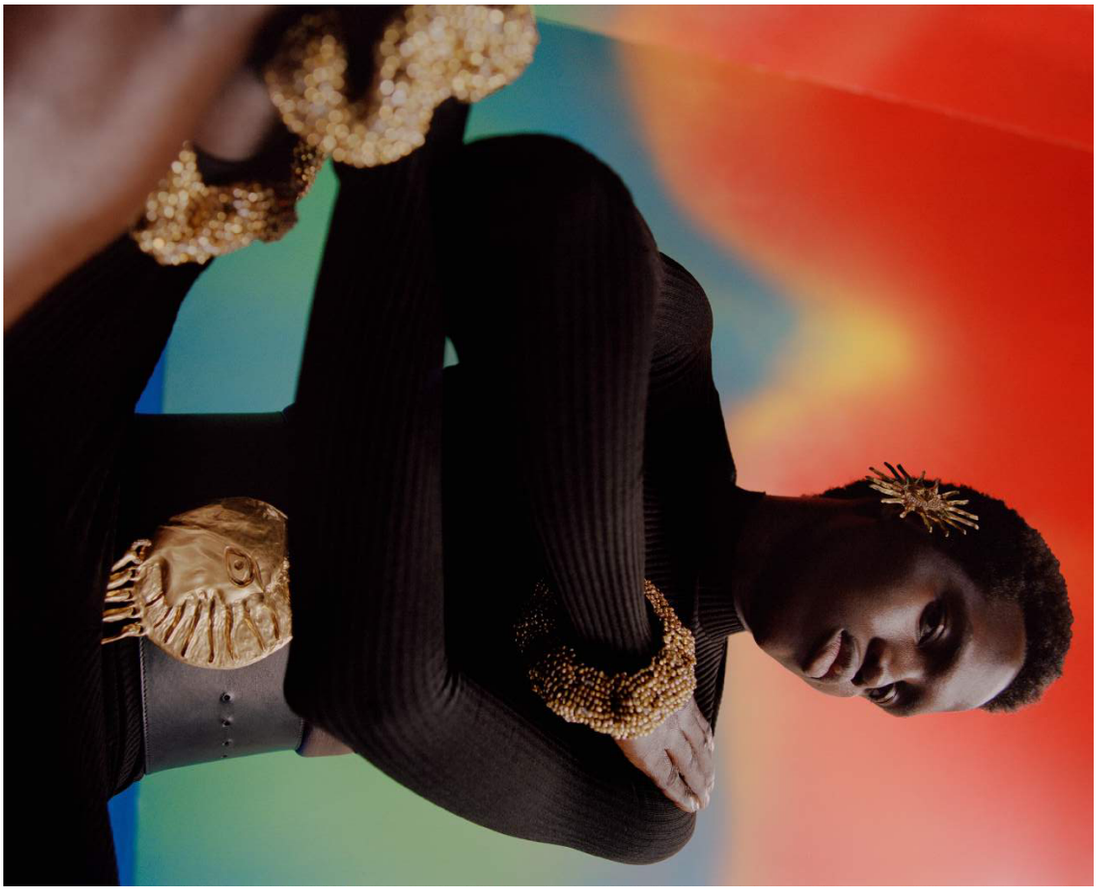


All clothes by Schiaparelli, ready-to-wear Autumn-Winter 2022.

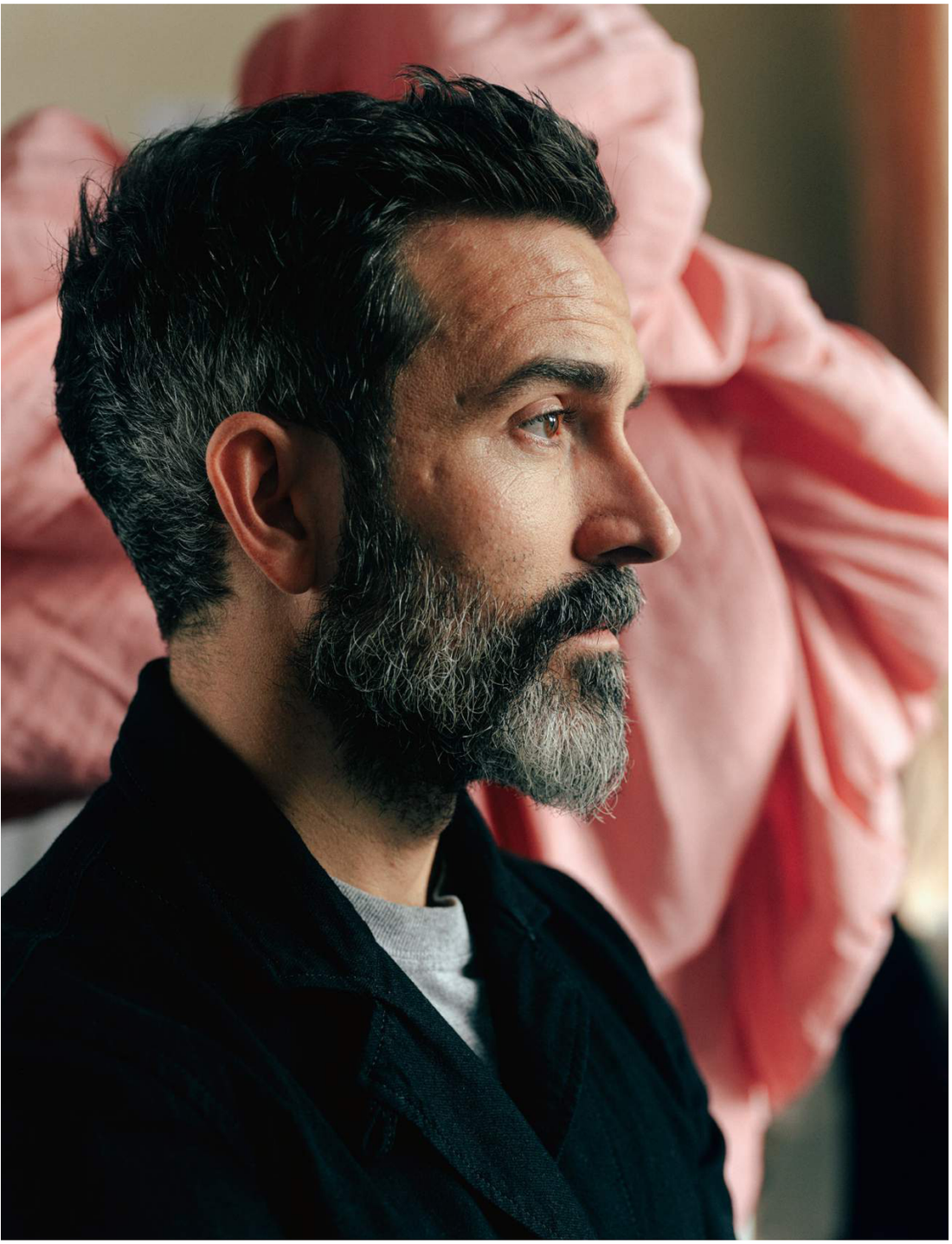








Models: Maty Fall, Lawal Badmus. Casting: Holly Cullen. Make-up: Chiao-Li Hsu. Hair: Virginie Moreira. Nails: Ama Quashie. Set design: Ibby Njoya.
Production: CLM. Producer: Sydney Marshall. Retouching: Touch Digital. Styling assistant: George Pistachio.



Daniel Roseberry is designing a new desk for his spacious office at Schiaparelli's HQ, which looks out onto the grandiose symmetry of the Place Vendôme in Paris. After three challenging years at the helm of the legendary house, it feels like he is discreetly loosening his stays and slipping into something a little more comfortable. 'It's very much a work in progress,' he says, almost tentatively, 'but this is a signal that I am settling in!'

In the wake of the 2020 pandemic that threw everyone and everything into a maelstrom of confusion and self-doubt, Roseberry confidently burst back onto a newly reopened international stage last year with a series of sensational *coups de théâtre* worthy of the house's illustrious founder, Elsa Schiaparelli.

In January 2021, at the inauguration of Joe Biden, Lady Gaga serenaded the newly elected President of the United States in a navy jacket by the designer, decorated with an extravagant gilded dove of peace, and a skirt that exploded into volumetric tiers of washed red silk faille. Seven months later, Roseberry's reputation was further sealed with Bella Hadid's other-worldly appearance on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival, wearing an exquisite gold bustier masterfully cast and crafted to represent a pair of life-giving lungs. The vision was pure Elsa and recalled her own celebrated collaborations with Salvador Dalí.

After long being starved of such spectacle, the fashion world gasped at the sight of this almost saintly apparition. The house of Schiaparelli was no longer just a whisper on Mae West's lips!

'The house of Schiaparelli is a singular thing,' says performer Tilda Swinton, who has also worn Roseberry's chimeric creations over the past year. 'The landscape of its legacy – the practical magic of its resonance – is something almost mythical in the wide geography of the fashion universe. Schiaparelli means an intimate and ancient relationship between art and fashion, in particular with the vernacular of a Surrealism dear to the heart of Elsa Schiaparelli herself. In the hands of Daniel Roseberry, this resonance pulses with an energy and freshness that regularly takes the breath away.'

The designer's latest couture collection – a palette-cleansing exercise in monochromatic minimalist maximalism – was his first live presentation since Covid had sent everyone racing into the metaverse. Monolithic dresses stalked the runway like charismatic megafauna beamed down from outer space into a Kubrickian dreamscape.

Roseberry recently launched his first ready-to-wear collections, sold exclusively through Bergdorf Goodman, which both complement and extend his couture process and creative vision. The iconic Surrealist signifiers and stylistic hybridization of his couture collections have now been integrated into clothes and accessories to accompany the new Schiaparelli woman as she descends from her gilded pedestal and steps into the 'real world'.

As a designer, Roseberry seems to find inspiration in a narrative that has its roots in his childhood. His own sentimental education reads like a dramatically charged coming-of-age novel in which the protagonist ultimately achieves self-awareness and self-confidence through art and creativity.

Geography has played an important role in that journey, and those places with which he has fallen in or out of love have influenced both his life choices – or his 'forks in the road', as he calls them – and his sensibility: the claustrophobia of his upbringing in Dallas, Texas; the revelation of the New York years working alongside Thom Browne; and the escapism of the coastline of Maine which, as he explains is, 'the place where I think I first met myself as an adult, and ironically, it's the place I run to when I want to feel like a kid again.'

Hanya Yanigahara, the acclaimed author of bestseller *A Little Life*, recently dedicated her new dystopian epic *To Paradise* to Roseberry and they share an intimate, intuitive relationship. 'When you're a writer, you write when you feel like it,' Yanigahara explains, 'and (ideally) only when you feel like it. Daniel and his peers don't have that luxury. Some artistic directors turn their gaze outward in response, always looking for something to inspire them, but some – and I believe that, ultimately, Daniel belongs in this category – venture ever-further inward, to an emotional landscape they've created and tend year after year. They're constantly harvesting from this invented world, one accessible only to them. It's a special way to create, but a punishing one as well. For the most imaginative among them, though, the results are unmistakable and undeniable.'

'I like the idea of being able to hide behind the heritage and the weight of something, like Schiaparelli, that existed before me. It's legitimizing.'

Jerry Stafford: Let's start by discussing where you grew up, your childhood, and your home life.
Daniel Roseberry: I grew up in Texas, in a middle-class suburb of Dallas. My dad was a preacher in a church that he founded the year I was born, which became a mega-church of sorts. Both of my parents were born-again Christians; they were not brought up religiously but met at the seminary. My mum had two kids from a prior marriage and then they had me and my little sister. I guess my childhood was one of searching, of longing. I went to a private school in Dallas where everyone had tons and tons of money. We basically had none. I was daydreaming all the time of the things we couldn't have.

What are your earliest visual memories?
I remember watching my mum getting dressed for church, putting on her jewellery. I also remember playing with my sister in a pile of fallen leaves near my parents' house. In the fall. A lot of my early memories are related to fall.

What or who were your first sexual or sensual fantasies?
Good question. I remember being in seventh or eighth grade and I was sleeping over at my friend's house. We were lying on the bed and talking about this sex scene in a movie, and for the first time, I confessed to him that I had loved the movie, but that I couldn't stop looking at the boy. He thought that was really weird, and I don't think it was ever the same between us again. That was the first time I remember verbalizing something homoerotic.

Who was the actor?
I don't remember… oh, it was the shower scene in that terrible but amazing movie with Kurt Russell called *Captain Ron*.[1]

How did you experience growing up as a young gay man in the southern states of America?
Tortuous is a dramatic word, but it was sort of tortuous. It was a journey of deep self-hatred and thinking that I was a broken and failed heterosexual. That was the message: this is in God's best interest for you; you are a failed version of what you should have been and it's your job to bring yourself back to a general semblance of normality; if not, then celibacy would be the ideal solution.

Did you yearn to leave that environment and if so, to go where and why?
I was so terrified. I remember when I was at school, in my freshman year at college, and I had got into FIT, but rejected the idea of going twice because I was so scared of going to New York and falling into some crazy drugs scene and sex den.

You were scared of actually living the life you desired.
Yes, yes. Everyone processes their rebellion in a different way, and I was so cautious and nervous because I didn't want to disappoint anybody. I remember being a freshman and I was sitting alone reading *W* magazine and there was a story on Tom Ford, with a Steven Klein shoot.[2] I was filled with so much confusion and fear, and also longing. New York was a really difficult decision to make. I was a Christian missionary for a year prior to moving to New York – I really did try *every* option.[3]

Were you exposed to art growing up? You were brought up in Texas, so were you aware of the Menil Collection, for example, or the other great art institutions in the state?
I remember when the Nasher opened[4], that was a big deal. I come from a family of artists: my mom and my grandmothers on both sides and two of my uncles were extremely prolific artists. That was the foil to all the religious and spiritual dogma; there was always an appreciation for that world. I remember my grandmother had expensive museum catalogues, which were really inspiring for me, but I always felt really out of my depth talking about current modern art.

Who were your favourite writers back then?
I had a very classic education. I was really into Dickens, Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. I have this thing with Hanya Yanagihara[5] called EGS, which stands for 'exquisite gay sorrow'. We're always talking about what triggers EGS, like did you have an EGS sort of a day? A lot of the writing I was drawn to that predated this life was very EGS.

Was music an important part of your life at that time?
Music hit me after, like mid-high school and after high school. Before that I was obsessed with the movies, and I wanted to be a Disney animator. So it wasn't until I moved to New York when music completely replaced cinema as my number-one inspiration.

'My dad was a preacher in a church that he founded the year I was born. Both of my parents were born-again Christians.'

Where or what was your first encounter with what could be termed as fashion? The one that made you feel it was an area of interest that could possibly take you somewhere?
I started to draw women and clothes before this moment, but the *real* moment happened when I was 16. Style Network came to Texas, and they did a free bundle, with *Fashion File*, *Behind the Velvet Ropes*, all those things. There was a special on Michael Kors and I saw in detail the journey of his collection, and at the same time learned that he was from a similar middle-class background. He had gone to FIT and dropped out, and then his collection was on display at Barneys, and someone came and bought it, some crazy story like that. And I was like, 'OK, I could do that.'

What about your own personal style at that time? Did you follow any trends or movements?
I have always been a bit clueless about what to do with my own style and talking to you, it's so obvious, there are some people whose style and physicality are totally embedded with who they are. I just never felt like that. I remember watching the McQueen collections and then he would come out at the end, and the disconnect really resonated with me. I have never successfully been able to dress myself in an identifiable style. That is why Thom Browne was such a relief. Of course, I'd been in uniform since second grade. So through Thom Browne I learned everything.

What do you think was your real motivation behind this interest in design and fashion?
The answer is not very glamourous, but it was a way for me to justify my own existence; I think that being told that your identity is wrong…

As in your sexual identity?
My sexuality, which felt like my entire being. Design and the ability to wow people and to impress them, and to give them something else to applaud me for because I knew they would never applaud me for the decisions in my personal life – that became a huge motivating factor.

Did you ever have a mentor or someone who actively encouraged you in your studies and then your career?
Mentors have thankfully been a huge part of my life. At every step of the way I have had someone mentoring me; I have never been on my own. The first one was my mom, who taught me how to draw for hours and hours; she would stand over my shoulder as I did artworks for doctors' offices and stuff. Later there was the dean of the seminary who mentored me theologically and who also released me from a lot of this self-hatred. I almost went to seminary, and he told me absolutely not, you have to go to New York to be a designer. And then once in New York it was Thom, so yes, there have been lots of mentors.

Are you an ambitious person or are you more intuitive? Have you been drawn almost inexplicably and unconsciously towards the future and your place in it?
I know this sounds insane, but I always felt that the hand of God has been in my life from the beginning. I have always felt like this; I didn't really have a say. I felt that fashion chose me in a way, and I have been toiling to get to this place. I have never even considered doing anything else.

Are you still a practising Christian? Do you still believe in a Christian God?
I believe that the Christian God is a mechanism by which I can understand God, but I do not at all prescribe to the narrowness of a Christian faith. I do also believe that Jesus represents one aspect of maybe the way that God or a creator wants to relate to the world, but I don't know if I would call myself a Christian any more.

Jumping forward, how did you navigate the move to Paris from the States in 2019, and what is your relationship to the city? How do you fit in here?
I had prepared my life in New York so I could abandon it. I had already moved out of my apartment, and I was sleeping on a friend's floor. Everything I owned was already in storage because I really believed this job was mine. When it happened, I literally came here with two suitcases. Everything else I own is still in storage in New York. Looking back on my arrival in Paris, I was so glad that I really had no idea what it meant to be doing my first collection. I had no idea, and the great thing was that no one really had any expectations because the house was so sleepy at the time. My relationship with Paris has been really rough, though. I really feel like a stranger in this city; I have never lived somewhere and felt like this. New

'I got into FIT, but rejected the idea of going twice because I was so scared of going to New York and falling into some crazy drugs scene and sex den.'

York was such an amazing life; it was so rich. I had friendships; I had Sunday-night dinners; I was surrounded by people who loved me, and I always entertained at my house. I have never spent more time alone than I have here over the past three years.

How would you sum up that time when you lived and worked in New York, the changes that you experienced in the city, the shifting political framework and creative challenges?
I was 23 when I started at Thom Browne. I came out to my parents a week before I started my internship. I was in the closet throughout college, completely shut down, so I was really born then, this second birth, the second coming out. In those first five or six years at Thom Browne, when we were really building the foundation of that company, it was like the Wild West. It was unsupervised, plus my life in Brooklyn, it was such a dream. I look back at that time with such nostalgia. I had the best friends in Brooklyn. We have all disbanded now, everyone has scattered because of Covid and everything, but there was a summer in 2018 – or 2016, 2017, I can't remember – when we went to Maine. At the end of that trip, something had shifted in my mind, and I thought: 'I never am going to get to where I want to be in my career if I stay in this Brooklyn neverland world, and if I stay at Thom Browne.' That was a turning point for me and within a few months I moved to the West Village in a studio and started over. I walked away from a lot, and I am extremely nostalgic for that.

Did you always aspire to head up an important historical fashion house? Was all the experience you acquired part of this ambition?
Yes, 100%. All of my years working at Thom were spent pining for my own thing, but I never thought it would be my own brand. I like the idea of being able to hide behind the heritage and the weight of something that existed before me.

Would you say that's connected to your childhood?
Yes, completely. Something that is legitimizing. It was really one of the most uncomfortable things when I left Thom Browne. It was not very long, just six or seven months, but I was so uncomfortable because I had nothing with which to justify myself to the world. You go to a party, and no one knows who you are; you are constantly having to justify your existence to people, especially in New York. So I always wanted it.

Now you are here in Paris and installed at Schiaparelli, what importance does the house's history and heritage have for you? You've said that you have never read a biography of Elsa Schiaparelli, why?
When I first started I had no interest in tapping into the heritage because I felt it had already been the focal point of prior years. I really tried to re-establish the voice of the house *and* make it personal. When I felt that we had done that on some level, I was able to return to her work. I have been truly blown away, humbled and proven wrong about the relevance that her work still has. The more I reference her work and use it as a starting point, the better it makes my work. Her legacy feels like an untold story. The exhibition that is opening in July is the first step I think in maybe telling that story to a wider audience.[6] She was the kind of person, with her voice and her personality and her character, who if I met her at a dinner party, I would be probably the most intimidated to talk to. That's probably why I've refused to read her biographies.

Nonetheless, the house archive is an invaluable source for your work. How do you approach and navigate it and how has this research manifested itself in specific pieces?
What we do every season is go back to the archive. It's mainly imagery because we don't have physical archives here. They have a huge archive at the Met, I think, and most of the great pieces are at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; it has the lobster dress.[7] We always print out all the imagery of, like, iconic Schiaparelli jackets or accessories – because she did these outrageous accessories, these titbits that went along with the collection – and we have them out as the collection grows. It all becomes the subtext for everything. There are normally one or two pieces that present themselves, like the teacup coat, which just felt right. And some time last year, being sort of literal with the archives suddenly felt fun, like the shoe on the head. Sometimes it is about abstracting it; other times, it is about holding it very tight and being literal. What I enjoy the most here is that with Chanel or Dior or definitely with Balenciaga, you don't get a true personality like you do with Schiaparelli. You get a vision, you get savoir-faire and technique, and you get world-changing silhouettes – but you don't get personality or a sense of humour. That is her greatest legacy, and what gives me permission to imbue that into the work as well.

'With Chanel, Dior or Balenciaga, you don't get a true personality or a sense of humour like you do with Elsa Schiaparelli. That is her greatest legacy.'

You can be quite cavalier about it. Has the Surrealist movement, so important in Schiaparelli's lifetime and to her work, been an influence on your own process or design? There are many signifiers, surreal objects, masks, and so on that are integrated into the clothes, but beyond that I feel that the way you have pieced together couture garments from the narratives of other designers is reminiscent of the Surrealist parlour game, the Exquisite Corpse.[8] Was this in your mind during that process?
You're the only person who has ever really verbalized that for me because it's true the Surrealist movement, as an art movement, is far less inspiring than building a Surrealist *process*. That space where pre-associations can be made is like gymnastics, you know. That idea of collaging together different fetishizations of other designers' work is something I try and be really open about, because it's so obvious sometimes. It's like when Virgil [Abloh] said, 'You only need to change things 10%.' I am definitely not trying to copy, but I love scratching that itch – like, what if we do something that is this designer on top and bottom, but the middle is Lacroix? I love playing that game.

It is a game, and it's a wonderful one, whether visual or textual, as it's a way of accessing the unconscious and opening oneself up to chance – '*le hasard*'! Something that intrigues me is that there are so many utterly compelling narratives around the history of the house, aside from the obvious relationships with Cocteau and Dalí. The poet and patron Edward James for example whom Schiaparelli called the 'true English eccentric'.[9] She remembers James giving Dalí a stuffed polar bear dyed shocking pink! Are any of these eccentrics that surrounded Schiaparelli attractive to you? Does eccentricity in itself inspire you?
That's a great question. Yes, it does. What's hard for me about eccentricity in other people is that I have a tough time accessing a real connection with it and that can kind of throw me off sometimes. My best friend, for example, is wildly eccentric; she's living a life that is not really in accordance with the way other people live, and I find it endlessly inspiring to have those conversations, and to spend time with her and learn about that. I am very earthbound in the way that I live my life. We had that conversation about Edward James in Mexico, and I always think about that because I love that sensual side to Surrealism, which I think about a lot.

When I see your work I always think of artists like Méret Oppenheim, Louise Bourgeois, and more contemporary figures like David Altmejd or Sarah Lucas. Who were or are, of course, sculptors. Your work has often been called 'sculptural', for want of a better word, and you have collaborated with ceramicist and metallurgist artisans on specific pieces. Do you see these as collaborations, and do you enjoy the collaborative process? Would you work with an artist on a collaboration as so many people do these days in fashion?
I didn't want to do collaborations at the beginning, because I didn't want the legitimacy of the house or of me to be linked with or indebted to the collaborator. There are two types of collaborations: there is the process collaboration, which you go through with an artisan, which is a chain reaction of creative decisions informed by their skill set. I owe everything to that. Then there is the kind of collaboration that you put out to the world and announce with an artist. In my original project, Sarah Lucas was actually someone who I proposed doing a collaboration with. I even did sketches of what we could do...

Did you approach her?
No, never, but there was definitely a conversation with her in my mind with the original project. I would love to do that. I'd love to collaborate not only with visual artists; doing music together would be almost more interesting, something about visual and non-visual together feels less contrived. There is something more open about the musical process. It is a playground for me where I can create something visual within a space like this. Sometimes I have albums that I remember specifically listening to while creating a collection that are then so inextricably linked. I remember the project I made to be hired for Thom Browne was done in accordance with Björk's *Homogenic*. That would be a dream of mine to collaborate with musicians.

'I tried to re-establish the voice of the house *and* make it personal. When I felt that we had done that, I was able to return to Elsa's work.'

Contentious question: do you believe that what you do is art?
I think couture can approach art, but for the most part I would say that it's an applied art.

How do you feel about social media? You have a personal Instagram, but do you fantasize about being able to present a collection where iPhones are banned and the experience remains purely within the moment, held as a memory communicated verbally without an accompanying barrage of imagery? Perhaps even going back to the golden age of illustration?
I do fantasize, if not every day, then every other day, about getting off all social media. I would love it. I remember when Tom Ford came back for his first collection[10] and there were no photographers and no phones allowed, and I remember Steven Stipelman[11] was there to do illustrations instead. That was an impossible throwback. I'm 36 and I'm the last generation that remembers what it was like to go through high school without any social media. I would gag for the opportunity to present work to an engaged audience, because when I look on the monitor backstage, no one is even looking at the collection, they are looking at their phone screens. It is unreal to me that we have spent hundreds of thousands of euros and hours creating what we would hope would approach art and then the people who are there physically are just watching it through their screens… It's like going to a movie theatre and watching a movie through your phone screen. It is totally devastating. Whenever I have gone to a show, I make a point never to bring my phone out. It's not that it is disrespectful, but it's a major missed opportunity. Lacroix said, 'I want people leaping', but no one is going to leap through their phone, like why watch it? You have to really let go to leap. I have a really contentious relationship with the digital world, but at the same time I know there's no point in fighting it. It's happening no matter what.

Yet you do enjoy the photographic process these days, shooting your own lookbooks for the last couple of seasons. Do you feel you are the person who is most trusted to represent your own work?
I know what goes through the minds of people when a designer says, 'I want to shoot it myself', because every single person I talked to about it literally rolled their eyes and said, 'OK, here's another one.' I've heard the way people talk about other designers' photographs, but I felt like it was a sort of an extension of the creative process. When we came back from Covid, we did this shoot outside because we wanted to do it without masks, and it was so much fun. I just absolutely loved it. It was going to be me and [stylist] Marie Chaix, whom I see as a partner in crime, especially on those shoot days, and to have to go through a photographer's vision for a lookbook didn't seem necessary. For an editorial, yes, it is completely different. Do I think I'm the world's greatest photographer? Well, no! [Laughs]

How much of yourself have you written into the creative process or is it just so all-consuming that it consumes your whole life? I'm thinking about that first show with you at the centre… Do you have time out from that identity? Can you step aside from your work?
It's everything to me. All of me is wrapped up in it, and using of myself, exposing myself felt really urgent in that show. It's an impulse I have every season that I have to fight a bit because a designer putting himself at the centre can be distracting or just really unwelcome; not many people want to see that. It made sense with that first show because it was an introduction, a coming-out of sorts, but I feel most myself when we are in fittings upstairs at the Place Vendôme.[12] I feel this sort of split personality thing happens when we are creating couture; I literally feel so connected with what I am supposed to be doing. The only other place that I truly feel that way is when I am in Maine, and there is always this sort of fork in the road between the hyper-introverted way and then this extroverted performative way. That is what I love about dressing celebs, because it is as close I will probably come to being on that red carpet.

Do you dream, and if yes are they vivid and visual?
I rarely remember my dreams and when I do it's because they are sexual in nature.

I was about to ask you to describe a recent one!
I had an erotic dream two nights ago, but the person was just laying on top of me, like I just could feel the person's weight and I woke up in the middle of the dream and they were whispering in my ear. It was a very intense sensual dream…

Do your dreams in any way motivate your work?
My daydreams are the motivation and that goes back to the Surrealist process. I daydream during walks, on a train or a plane; it's very EGS, looking out of the window, listening to music. That sort of free association, daydream world, which is 95% of the dreamworld.

This is the wonderful Surrealist idea of *disponibilité* or availability. How important is storytelling in your work? Do you start with any kind of meta-narrative, like a figure from a movie or someone you've found really inspirational? Is it something technical or material, or is it more ephemeral, just a feeling?
It is more about what I want the emotional payoff to be. It's not literal. I think sometimes of the muses and the different inspirations that present themselves, but they are all a consequence of how I want people to feel during and after the show, and where I want the house to be placed in their mind, in the echelon of the different houses. It is a very emotional strategy. Sometimes I will write the review that I want to be written about us, months in advance, as a way of setting a goal. I remember doing this first because I read a Tim Blanks review of a Thom Browne show. I love the way Tim reviews, and his work has always been super-inspiring. It became like a mantra for me to sort of chase this – this is what I want people to say about this show – and I write as if I am writing it for *Vogue* in the third person, then I put it away until after the show. It's a meta mantra-setting exercise.

I'm intrigued by the passion you have for Hanya Yanagihara and her extraordinary books. Her most recent novel, *To Paradise*, which I just finished, is dedicated to you. Can you talk a bit about your relationship with her and how and why her work has been so important to you?
My entire youth up until the age of 23 was a conversation between me and shame, which was like the devil on my back the entire time. Right when I came out, I also started taking prescription Adderall, which I took every day for eight years. It was the hardest thing to quit, quitting smoking was nothing compared to quitting that, because I couldn't do anything without it. I couldn't work without it. That really marked my twenties; it was a huge burden for me. Just this sort of hyper self-hating conversation I was having as I was trying to remove myself from the shame of being gay in the Christian world and being a broken heterosexual, or whatever the narrative was. When I read *A Little Life*, there were moments where I literally slammed the book closed and would audibly yell at Hanya because she was in my head and putting words and actions to the inner workings of my mind and the past experiences that I'd had, and I was so upset with her for that and also for the way that she ended the book. Many of our conversations are debates because for her that book is basically a treatise on the idea that certain people are beyond repair, and that there's a point at which redemption cannot really access you, and – this is the Christian side to me – I fundamentally disagree with that; I have to. That book really triggered a flashback to the co-dependent relationships that I had been in. That's what I said to her, I said that book is bullshit, because the relationship between Jude and Willow is an impossible relationship that you make work – but it's not real. It's a complete facade. I have been in those relationships with straight men who bend to be your partner, and it was just such a sham. Co-dependency was a huge thing for me in my relationships. But I still loved every page of that book – it blew me away.

Do you think her third novel is a response to that idea of redemption?
I'm only half-way through *To Paradise*, but I do know that that novel was dedicated to me because it was written during our friendship and during extensive conversations that we were having about each other and the global potential for redemption. So I'm very curious to see how she bends or doesn't bend to that idea.

There is one quote that struck me in *To Paradise,* which reads: 'it's funny because of all the things I was scared of, I was never scared of the dark, I was never scared of the dark, in the dark everyone was helpless, and knowing that I was just like everyone else, no less, everyone made me feel braver.' Are you scared of the darkness? Of the

'I'd gag for the opportunity to present work to an engaged audience, because when I look on the monitor backstage, they're looking at their phones.'

'My relationship with Paris has been rough. I feel like a stranger in this city. I've never spent more time alone than I have in the past three years.'

unknown or on the contrary, like David in the book, are you reassured and empowered by the knowledge that we can never know ourselves or anything?
I know that I'm being influenced by my Christian upbringing, but I don't believe in that at all. I don't believe that we cannot know ourselves. There is no way we can grasp everything, but I also don't think that God wants to remain unknowable. That's the thing – the point is to try and know and to try and excavate, and I think that inside of that there could be redemption. So, no that is not me.

Does Hanya's dystopian vision of the past and present, and her engagement in this narrative, inform your own way of seeing things in any way? Is potential environmental disaster or a global conflict or pandemic factored into your own design fantasy? Could you call your work political, like the Surrealists ? Do you have a manifesto?
A lot of people ask me what designing clothes for the end of the world looks like, because when I started at Schiaparelli, I said, how do you dress for the end of the world? That was in 2018. I guess you have two options: you can sort of address the reality and embrace it or you can create an imaginary space in which we can all be naive again. The last collection we did was a little sombre, a bit stoic; it was definitely rooted in rigour, which felt comforting, given the times. But the season before that and the season I am working on now are, let's say, much more like the first 10 minutes of *Father of the Bride*[13]; I don't know if you have seen that film. This is the kind of comment that Hanya would want to kill me for, but I remember watching that movie when I was 13 years old. It's a terrible reference, but it is pre-everything, pre 9/11, pre-Covid; it's just like this blissful innocence, similar to when I watched the Warhol documentary,[14] with its pre-AIDS world… I find myself running to those periods as a point of reference and when we talk about the Exquisite Corpse and the *Frankenstein*-ing of different designer's work, I'm always going towards that sort of time compared to now; those naive periods, where glamour could just be glamour, and there was a freedom to it. I have a hard time knowing how to address the meaninglessness of all of it.

You were talking before about fantasy and celebrities and of course, you and your designs are no stranger to the red carpet, whether it's cinema, music, or a presidential inauguration. What is your perspective on this form of performance or power dressing?
I am so inspired and interested by the idea of fame and celebrity, and the way that human beings can create pop culture. What it does to you as a human being has always been super inspiring for me. Michael Jackson, from the very beginning, became a sort of keynote figure for me because he was extraordinarily shy, but he became a more alive version of himself on stage. I'm always thinking about that whenever we are dressing people. When we dressed Gaga for the inauguration, I was thinking about what it must be like to wake up in the morning.[15] I mean, how do you even sleep the night before? And then you get dressed, you brush your teeth, you go to the bathroom, you have your coffee before you literally perform for the entire world – live.

Balancing those mundane everyday life actions with a global performance.
I imagine there is something extremely destructive about that as well. We have both been around enough famous people, we know that maintaining your humanity and your connection to what is real is a challenge. I have been around many famous people in the last few years, and I often feel that even if they are asking you questions about yourself, they are just going through the motions because they know it's what they should be doing. It's really rare to meet someone who has been able to stay real.

'Sometimes I'll write the review that I want to be written about us, months in advance. I write as if I am writing it for *Vogue*, in the third person.'

It has been inspiring how your clothes have been worn by such a diverse and amazing community of artists. What have been some of the most satisfying moments for you, when you have felt there was a perfect osmosis of form and figure, of celebrity and humanity, of appearance and being?
I think that 2021 was so unique because although we didn't even realize it until 2022, there were a lot of first moments last year, like the first post-Covid moment. We had Gaga at the inauguration and then Bella [Hadid], who was the first red-carpet moment in Cannes.[16] I was particularly proud of Bella because it felt like a really harmonious marriage between something that was approaching art with someone who was purely representing a pop-culture moment in time. For me, it was all so simple. I think that the idea of the lungs was literally to see just her face and those lungs and that was the entire moment. I am really proud of how pure that moment was, and for me it was *the* moment of last year.

Having worked with the actress Tilda Swinton myself for many years, it is a pleasure to experience a fitting where the star and the designer feel a real frisson of excitement and pleasure at the craftsmanship and vision with which they are engaging. In Tilda's case, she also feels a real connection with the brand and the house's historical past. How do you experience these moments? Is it inspiring?
The first ever movie I saw Tilda in was *The Beach*,[17] and I remember it very well because her role was hyper-sexual, and I was quite unnerved by it. It wasn't until *I Am Love* that she became seared in my mind. Do you remember when she eats the prawns?[18] That scene, I return to that scene, I would say, weekly in my mind. I just love that moment, that hiding in plain sight; it's one of the most key scenes I have seen in a long time. To be with her in a fitting, and to be working on dressing her and seeing these clothes come to life is electrifying. It is hard to know if the aura, the glow, the inspiration is coming because of the moment or because of the build-up to that moment that I have had for years. It is just so gratifying, and in this particular case, it was the first fitting I had had with a human being for almost two years because of Covid. It was the first time a human being who was not one of the house models had come to try things on. It really felt dreamlike in a way.

Tilda is very specific in her engagement with the world of fashion. She demands an intimacy with her collaborators, which as we know is not always the case. Is Tilda seductive because she wears the clothes in a more 'real' way and navigates a real space, rather than the fantasy of a public-performance arena? Do you prefer your clothes to perform, to project, or do you want them to exist in the present?
The reason why we have had such a diverse clientele on the red carpet is because I think I can do both – and I want to do both. The conversation with Tilda, and the personal connection that we felt when we were dressing her, was indeed the reality of her being and it didn't feel like a superficial celebrity artifice that she was going to project. You know when you dress a pop star they are looking to project out and hold everything back inside. With Tilda, you feel there is a generosity, like she's letting you access a true part of herself. That is what makes the magic happen on the red carpet, because she is doing that there as well. That's how it felt. But for someone else, like an iconic global popstar, that is not what the world really wants from them. Like Gaga, there is a necessary boundary between who they truly are and then what they are giving to the world, which I totally understand.

We can endlessly debate the relative importance, value and impact of clothes that exist on the red carpet with their exquisite unobtainable fantasy as opposed to something that is commercial and accessible. You have been developing the ready-to-wear collection over the past few seasons. How have you been exploring that in relation to couture? Are they like *vases communicants* – communicating vessels – to use a particularly Surrealist idea, or do you approach the two collections very differently?
What really connects them is the colour story. As long as the colour stories echo each other, the connection can be made even if the silhouettes are wildly different. Our couture process is really well defined now, and it's just about fittings, even more fittings with artisans. We had over 20 fittings for the last couture collection. There are things in the couture fittings that we think would be amazing for the ready-to-wear, for which my rule is that these insanely chic people who come for press appointments or private shopping should be able to leave wearing something with their jeans. It needs to be about the ease of something, about the ease of it all. Couture is designed for the most extraordinary and precious moments of your life, whether it's a wedding, a bat mitzvah, an opening of something or an event that you are hosting. And the ready-to-wear should be for everything else, for all of the other moments.

'Look at the direction that houses like Chanel and Dior have taken; it is undeniably mainstream. That opens the door for us to do something alternative.'

How has your relationship with Diego Della Valle evolved over these last years, and do you share the same vision for the house?
Diego has been in love with Schiaparelli and Elsa Schiaparelli for years and years and years, and he acquired Schiaparelli right about the time he acquired Vivier.[19] Diego and I connect first and foremost about the

dream of Schiaparelli – he calls it the 'last great dream in fashion'. It is this sort of untapped or pure uncontaminated house that has not been spoiled in any way and we both really deeply connect on the potential of the house. At the beginning, the relationship was just going through a defining and redefining phase. I think that my aesthetic vision was different to the one he was expecting, and I was not referencing the codes of the house enough. We had to have a come-to-Jesus type meeting about that, and I will never forget it. He kind of explained more explicitly what he needed to see in order to feel good about pouring all this money into the project. I love an assignment and that reckoning was an assignment. Then Covid hit. I had peace and quiet because no one was able to visit for over a year. Diego was not able to come here, even if we could meet up in Italy and we could communicate, but I was largely left to work on my own and I think that what emerged was this vision that's in accordance with what he wants, too. It's something hyper-luxurious, but also – and this is important to me – it is also hyper-alternative. When you look at the direction that Chanel and Dior and all of those houses have taken, it is undeniably mainstream. That opens the door for us to do something that feels almost like alternative music, and that is what I would hope we are establishing.

If there were to be a new perfume, what would be the ideal components? I am not asking in a literal sense, the components could be abstract, an emotion.
For the house to re-engage in a conversation with fragrance, we would need to entirely revisit the way in which Elsa approached perfume. As with everything, she had her own unique way of doing fragrance, and the way she marketed it was completely revolutionary. Some of these more iconic old perfumes no longer resonate with today, but their formulas usually hold the key as to how to move forward. What Schiaparelli's answer to fragrance would look like today feels very intriguing.

There is a quote from *A Little Life* about happiness, where Willow says: 'but what was happiness but an extravagance, an impossible state to maintain. Partly because it was so difficult to articulate.' What is happiness to you? Are you happy in your creative environment?
I would say the past six months have been extremely difficult here in Paris, just because I feel so married to the job and so alone in it as well. It's like a season I guess, and I think that Paris holds something bigger for me to unlock.

I'm sure. Paris is a hard nut to crack on many levels!

1. *Captain Ron*, directed by Thomas Eberhardt and released in 1992, starred Ken Russell as the eponymous and drunken sailor hired to skipper a yacht for a family of unhappy yuppies. According to Vincent Canby in the *New York Times*, '"Captain Ron" looks like the pilot film for an unsold sitcom.' The son – remembered by Roseberry – was played by Benjamin Salisbury, who would later star in a hit sitcom: from 1993 to 1999, he played Brighton Sheffield in *The Nanny*.

2. This story was most likely 'Tom Ford: Fordbitten', a Steven Klein series published in *W* in January 2005. The *Gattaca*-style shoot sees Ford dressed in a black suit with robotic-looking models in states of undress. In one image, Ford appears to be using an industrial polisher to buff the naked buttocks of a male model.

3. In January 2021, Roseberry told *L'Officiel*: 'I was a missionary in India, Pakistan, Jordan, and Kashmir when I was 19 years old. It was another life.'

4. The Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, was founded by John de Menil and Dominique de Menil, to house their 17,000 drawings, paintings, photographs, prints, rare books, and sculptures. The museum building, designed by Renzo Piano, opened in 1987, and a Cy Twombly Gallery was added in 1995. The Rothko Chapel, also founded by the Menils, is a neighbour to the Collection. The Nasher Sculpture Center opened in 2003 in a building also designed by Piano and showcases the over-300-piece Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, which includes work by Alexander Calder, Willem de Kooning, Alberto Giacometti, Pablo Picasso, Henry Moore, and Barbara Hepworth.

5. Hanya Yanagihara is an American author and journalist. Her second novel, *A Little Life*, was published to wide acclaim and unexpectedly strong sales in 2015 and nominated for the Man Booker Prize. She recently published her third, *To Paradise*. She has been editor-in-chief of *T*, the *New York Times*' style magazine, since 2017.

6. *Shocking! Les Mondes Surréalistes d'Elsa Schiaparelli* will run from 6 July 2022 to 22 January 2023 at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. It is the first exhibition dedicated to the designer at the museum since 2004.

7. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute has over 300 Schiaparelli pieces in its archive, from couture dresses and hats to buttons and belts. The Philadelphia Museum of Art's 66 pieces by Schiaparelli were a gift from the designer herself in 1969, and include the celebrated 'lobster dress', first shown in February 1937. Made of printed silk organza and synthetic horsehair and co-designed with Salvador Dalí, it was made famous after Wallis Simpson bought one from Schiaparelli before her scandalous marriage to the Duke of Windsor in 1937. She was photographed wearing it by Cecil Beaton for *Vogue* the same year.

8. Popular in the 1920s and much loved by Surrealists, exquisite corpse or *cadavre exquis* is a game that consists of each participant writing or drawing on a sheet of paper, folding it so as to hide their addition, and then passing it to the next player. The result is a collaborative and often surprising work.

9. Edward James (1907-1984) was a British poet and patron of the arts. Using his inherited wealth, he supported many members of the Surrealist movement including Dalí and René Magritte, who painted his portrait twice. He is now perhaps better remembered for Las Pozas, a collection of his Surrealist concrete sculptures set in 32 hectares of subtropical rainforest in the Sierra Gora mountains in Mexico.

10. Tom Ford's Spring/Summer 2011 collection was unveiled in September 2010 at a discreet show, with the clothes worn by models including Beyoncé, Julianne Moore, Lou Doillon and Rinko Kikuchi. The first images of the collection appeared in an exclusive shoot in the December 2010 issue of French *Vogue*.

11. Steven Stipelman worked as a fashion illustrator for *WWD* from 1965 until 1993 when all the newspaper's illustrators were fired. He has taught at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, since 1994.

12. Elsa Schiaparelli moved into the 98-room, 5-storey Hôtel de Fontpertuis at 21 Place Vendôme in 1935. It housed an atelier and a ground-floor boutique in an interior decorated by designer Jean-Michel Frank and artist Alberto Giacometti.

13. *Father of the Bride*, directed by Charles Shyer, was released in 1991. Starring Steve Martin, Diane Keaton, and – like *Captain Ron* – Martin Short, the comedy was a remake of Vincente Minnelli's 1950 film of the same name, which starred Spencer Tracy and Elizabeth Taylor. In his *Washington Post* review of Shyer's film, Desson Howe wrote: 'Very often it look as though *Bride* magazine scripted the whole affair. Undoubtedly, there's an audience for it.'

14. *The Andy Warhol Diaries* premiered on Netflix on 9 March 2022. In the documentary series, the artist's own private journals are read by an actor whose voice has been altered using AI to sound more like Warhol himself.

15. In December 2021, Lady Gaga told British *Vogue* that the Roseberry-designed jacket that she wore at the inauguration was actually bulletproof.

16. The Schiaparelli Autumn/Winter 2021 haute-couture dress worn by Bella Hadid on the red carpet at the rescheduled Cannes Film Festival on 11 July 2021 was low-cut black crepe with, across the chest, brass lungs featuring rhinestones on the bronchioles.

17. Tilda Swinton's performance as the intense and unbalanced Sal is a highlight of the otherwise disappointing Danny Boyle-directed 2000 adaptation of Alex Garland's cult novel *The Beach*.

18. In Luca Gaudagnino's 2009 film *I Am Love*, Tilda Swinton's character, Emma, is deeply aroused by eating two shrimps. The crustaceans become the first step in what will become a tragic affair with the young chef who prepared them.

19. Diego Della Valle and his brother Andrea bought Roger Vivier in 2001. In November 2015, they sold it for €415 million to Tod's, a company of which Diego is president and Andrea vice-president. Della Valle bought Schiaparelli in 2007, but the house did not present a collection until 2014.

‘My problem has been not having a filter.’

The new generation of fashion critics, in their own words.

Text and interviews by Loïc Prigent

Without criticism, fashion would resemble an interminable football – or even worse, cricket! – match that no one understood. Luckily, critics – like sports commentators – do exist to help identify the players, the stakes, the champions, and the achievements.

The following series of questions and answers is an attempt to understand the new generation of fashion critics. The exercise clearly has its limits (if only because the questions were written by the older generation), but is nevertheless motivated by a genuine desire to uncover and understand what drives these new Suzy Menkes, these modern John Fairchilds, these one-person *WWD*s. Their media channels are their Instagram, YouTube and TikTok accounts. Their code of ethics is self-proclaimed – or not. Their point of view is fresh, visceral, informed, and quite often mocking and mordant. Some are read or watched by all the design studios in all the fashion houses, without ever once being invited to a show. They are buyers, sociologists, academics, or just passionately engaged schoolkids.
All are taking part in a golden age of fashion criticism: uninhibited, unfiltered, erudite, uncompromising, and in real time. And unjust, of course. But then an uncritical critic has another name: a press release. After all, aren’t subjectivity and a certain dedication fundamental parts of fashion? Alongside many other more positive values.

Some of these amateur critics are going to annoy you, some will go off course or lose the plot, some will make you smile, but others will open your eyes, reveal the beauty and the ridiculousness, and make fashion more intelligible, and therefore more intelligent.

Saveria Mendella
@saveriamendella on Instagram

Which media does your fashion criticism appear on?
My Instagram account.

How do you define your role?
Complicated, and indefinable on good days. I'm a PhD candidate, researcher, and consultant. I write, I speak. A lot of balls to keep juggling in the air.

What excites you during fashion week?
The shows, of course!

What do you expect from a good fashion show?
Press releases left on the chairs.

How do you convey your enthusiasm?
By doing a review. I know that newer brands invite me for that, and I love it.

What made you want to examine fashion?
Because it's probably the only thing I know how to do. It's even become my career. Fashion decryption deserves to be more well known and better understood.

What is the polite way of saying that a show was awful?
Silence.

What row do you sit in at Dior?
The front. Via the livestream.

Which other accounts influence you, and on which platforms?
None. I really don't have the time, even though I follow a lot of them as closely as I can. I avoid accounts that are too bitchy; they explain fashion in the wrong way. But fashion-media accounts remain an endless source of inspiration, for better and worse.

What are your favourite fashion shows of all time? First up, one that you attended.
Chanel, Spring/Summer 2018, precisely because I was there. I was under the stands, as a PR assistant – but the fact remains, I attended a Karl show.

And what about an older one you didn't actually attend?
Voss, Alexander McQueen, Spring/Summer 2001. Last year I spent a lot of time working on the presence of birds in fashion. That show was a starting point that I really wanted to highlight in my research. McQueen was inspired by one of Joel-Peter Witkin's photographs and by a Victorian asylum. The presence of feathers on the clothes and stuffed birds on the models made that collection a rare fashion moment when the wide use of animals, metaphorized, alive or dead, was so powerful. The images of that show – even today – allow you to see the too-quick and too-often-drawn parallel between the female and animal forms.

Who are your fashion critic heroes?
Diana Vreeland and Anna Piaggi, for their grandiose and barbed tone. The anonymous author of the "Points de Vue" in 1930s *Vogue*, for fashion literature. Robin Givhan, the only journalist to have won a Pulitzer for a book about fashion. Carine Bizet, for everything.

What did you think of the infamous review by Virginie Mouzat in *Le Figaro* that destroyed Tom Ford's show in 2011?
To me, the duty of show reviews is to point out things that cannot be seen in photographs. You can comment on everything! Virginie Mouzat took the reader behind the scenes at a collection presentation, but also into what are usually the secrets of the relationship between creative directors and the press. She was able to settle some scores because she has a voice. It's very contemporary. Also, this article may have lacked aesthetic arguments, but it at least restored the prestige of the freedom of the fashion press.

John Galliano insults you on the terrace of La Perle. What do you do?
I readjust my look number 39 from Dior Spring/Summer 2013 by Raf Simons, turn around and walk away.

'What row do I sit in at Dior? The front. Via the livestream.'

Timothy Chernyaev
@relaxitsonlyfashion on Tiktok

Which media do you use when you're researching your fashion criticism?
For photos I use the Vogue Runway app; for video, I use the YouTube channel content of the brand I am reviewing.

How do you define your role?
Fashion editor.

What excites you during fashion week?
Good clothes!

What do you expect from a really good fashion show?
I expect it to be cohesive without feeling overly studied, and I look for variety. I like designers who show day-, leisure-, work-, evening-, casual-, and formalwear – and accessories.

How do you convey your enthusiasm?
I like to go into details if I think something is really special; the more I show of something, the more I like it.

What made you want to examine fashion?
I love seeing people go from being a small business to a household name. It's so inspiring, especially when you've been following their work for a while.

What is the polite way of saying that a show was awful?
I try not to cover things if I think they're awful from start to finish. If I really think there's nothing worth seeing in a collection, then I won't share it.

What row do you sit in at Dior?

'Virginie Mouzat criticizing Tom Ford's appearance and physicality in *Le Figaro* comes off as quite rude.'

We'll see… I'm still waiting for them to respond to my invite request.

Which other accounts influence you, and on which platforms?
TikTok has great fashion content. I love @simon__gold; @oldloserinbrooklyn; @tinyjewishgirl; @officialhambly; @ebcjpg.

What are your favourite fashion shows of all time? First up, one that you attended.
I went to Rodarte's Fall 2008 show; that was wonderful.

And what about an older one you didn't actually attend?
Christian Lacroix, Fall 2001 couture. I might have to create a post about it soon.

Who are your fashion critic heroes?
Bridget Foley. I interned at *Women's Wear Daily* and got to spend some time around her. She's a wonderful writer.

What did you think of the infamous review by Virginie Mouzat in *Le Figaro* that destroyed Tom Ford's show in 2011?
I had never read it until just now. Criticizing his appearance and physicality comes off as quite rude.

John Galliano insults you on the terrace of La Perle. What do you do?
Tell him the men's sneakers at Margiela are bad and he really needs to work on them.

Dana Tarabey
@houseofdana on Instagram and YouTube

Which media do you use for your fashion criticism?
Mainly, Instagram. I also have a YouTube channel that I'd like to develop, as well as a site (vaguely) and I'm trying TikTok (vaguely).

How do you define your role?
Fashion critic, but also a popularizer of fashion studies who mixes fashion, social science, jokes, and poetic flourishes. The whole point is to escape the consensus through culture and to have a laugh. In an industry that says it wants to be more and more democratic, I'm trying to develop a capacity for analysis and promote critical thinking with solid foundations by making them accessible. The whole thing is really interactive. I'm always discussing with fashion students, professionals and fashion lovers who have all just had enough of the 'like/don't like', and who are looking at fashion as it really is: a brilliant cultural object that needs deciphering.

What excites you during fashion week?
The collective madness.

What do you expect from a good fashion show?
A big fat fashion idea stuffed full of historical references, a narrative, and coherence. I need to think. I also concentrate on the edit, savoir-faire and tailoring. The icing on the cake is when it actually provokes an emotion, of whatever kind.

How do you convey your enthusiasm?
In a freewheeling way, particularly in my Stories. Ever more complicated metaphors, messy outlining, GIFs, improbable songs, vlogs in pyjamas. I work really hard on the details and deliver everything 'natural-painting'.

What made you want to examine fashion?
I've looked at it for ages, but not as 'work'. I freelanced at various magazines and was given one piece of advice – keep your mouth shut; I wrote for different brands and was given one piece of advice – say that everything is amazing; I taught lots of classes and was given one piece of advice – never give less than 10 out of 20. All of it quietly got on my nerves. I just needed to express myself.

What is the polite way of saying that a show was awful?
'There was a really big problem with the edit.'

What row do you sit in at Dior?
Front row, in front of my computer.

Which other accounts influence you, and on which platforms?
I avoid accounts that have the same angle as me, precisely so I'm not influenced. So I would say: @ideservecouture and @maviedanslaqueuedelacaf for the laughs; @jorisdamour, small account, massive brain; @juliensanders for the vintage expertise and lunacy; and @julienmaelstrom and @sapecommejadis with whom I share a love of history and jokes.

'I convey my enthusiasm in a freewheeling way: complicated metaphors, messy outlining, GIFs, improbable songs, vlogs in pyjamas.'

What are your favourite fashion shows of all time? First up, one that you attended.
#worstquestion. Maison Rabih Kayrouz, Autumn/Winter 2020 haute couture, for its 'couturier's touch', which I follow and am obsessed with. Perfect draping, backs to die for, pockets made with supernatural savoir-faire, bewitching hyper-couture volumes. And well before Armani and Demna, the models walking in perfect silence. It was a moment out of time, quasi-meditative, and so humble. Incredible to experience.

And what about an older one you didn't actually attend?
#worstquestion2. Anyways, *Winter of Angels*, Thierry Mugler, Autumn/Winter 1984-1985, at the Zénith in Paris. I'm fascinated by those decades of 'flash cash and flamboyance'. This show was its climax. The idea of doing a show in what was then the coolest concert venue is brilliant. A show with tickets on sale to all, even more brilliant. It's probably not Mugler's best show in terms of fashion, but it was a demonstration of Mugler the total artist, with the crème de la crème of the coolest models on the planet (Pat Cleveland descending from the heavens as a glittery madonna, quell my heart!). It was all too much: 6,000 spectators, 250 looks, pyrotechnics worthy of a rock concert. It was the birth of the show as spectacle, but one in which clothing remains key.

Who are your fashion critic heroes?
Marie-Christiane Marek, the Nelson Monfort [legendary TV interviewer] of French fashion with her live commentary on shows and her interviews with McQueen. Mademoiselle Agnès, for her culture and humour. Jean-Paul Cauvin, for his articles that are both brutal and stylish. Sabrina Champenois, for the beauty of her words. Tim Blanks, obviously, even if he's calmed down over the years. And not a journalist, but a mega-mentor: [Studio Berçot head] Marie Rucki, who taught me everything.[2]

What did you think of the infamous review by Virginie Mouzat in *Le Figaro* that destroyed Tom Ford's show in 2011?
Tom Ford had a complicated relationship with the media, but paradoxically, he was also one of those people who they never dared criticize (even less so in France). Just for having 'dared' she deserves a medal. She contributed to fashion free speech, which is no bad thing. In terms of form, the attack was made even more violent by how chic her language is, which I love. The substance of the article seems pretty subjective. You can clearly see she has a problem with Tom Ford personally – and why not – but that deserved a different article. The original article is actually pretty hybrid: half-criticism, half-'I'm-going-to-do-him'.

John Galliano insults you on the terrace of La Perle. What do you do?
I reply with a total zinger, which will be amazing in my head, rubbish in reality. And then I will start crying because he will have broken my heart.

Hanan Besovic
@ideservecouture on Instagram

Which media do you use for your fashion criticism?
I only use social media for fashion criticism. Instagram is a platform where I can fully express how I feel about something because I know what my audience responds to. TikTok is also a great platform. Instagram Stories can go in-depth, while on TikTok you have to find a way to get your point out in three minutes. An underestimated platform for criticism is Twitter; lots of good conversations and analysis happen there.

How do you define your role?
People label me as fashion critic, which is flattering, but I don't like to call myself that. I did not get into the fashion industry the traditional way by learning about fashion within the walls of an educational institution; I simply have a passion for it and want to contribute. I've researched fashion, read as much as I can, learned about the industry, and I keep doing that. I am not a critic, more a commentator.

What excites you during fashion week?
Ideas make me excited; vision and thought, too. The entire fashion month is so hectic and busy, but it's like going to a listening party of your favourite group. You get to see what they were busy with for the previous few months, their inspirations, their influences, and how all that resulted in clothes.

What do you expect from a good fashion show?
I expect a lot. I am looking for a perfect balance of creativity, casting, set design, music, atmosphere, and wow moments. I'm difficult to satisfy when it comes to a good fashion show. Two moments that left me speechless in the last fashion month were Balenciaga and Versace, for two completely different reasons. With Balenciaga, we witnessed fashion history with models in a blizzard and emotional music playing. That was a slap of reality, especially with Demna's voice opening the show and the Ukrainian flags. We were all mesmerized. I will never forget the Versace show because of the finale. The models finished walking and disappeared behind huge, white blocks. Then they lifted and 'Attitude' by Lewis OfMan played, and the room was filled with Versace. I can't explain it better, but the oxygen in the room was in the shape of a gold Medusa. The lights started flashing and Donatella appears out of nowhere. I hate the word iconic, but that was ICONIC.

How do you convey your enthusiasm?
It mostly consists of humour and good pop-cultural, fashion moments. People love to laugh, so I try to put myself in the audience's position and ask if they

John Galliano insults you on the terrace of La Perle. What do you do? 'Take my phone and hit record.'

will get the joke. Just because it makes sense in my head doesn't mean it will for everyone. When a fashion moment is good, it's easy to convey the enthusiasm, like the recent Glenn Martens' Gaultier collection.

What made you want to examine fashion?
Honestly, I needed to vent. My page actually started on my real-life Instagram where I spoke about red-carpet dresses and my love for Alexander McQueen. But I was preaching to the wrong choir because my aunt thinks that McQueen's *Widows of Culloden* is an indie movie from the early 1980s, so I had to change my strategy and find my own group of people. That is how @ideservecouture was created. I had to vent about what I like, what I don't, and which red-carpet dress left me speechless.

What is the polite way of saying that a show was awful?
I never want to say that. Are there shows that I don't enjoy? Definitely. But maybe I am not the target audience for that collection, and that is fine. I always measure every show by what I would improve and how I would do it. That is my way of criticizing. I would never say that someone's vision is *wrong*; maybe it's just that I'm not seeing it.

What row do you sit in at Dior?
Seat D20. LOL jk... I most recently sat in the second row.

Which other accounts influence you, and on which platforms?
As I said, the atmosphere on Twitter is completely different to Instagram or TikTok. Twitter is a quick format; people are not into writing answers that are 400 words long, so they get to the point. There is always an interesting topic on Twitter, and it is a great source of fashion news. My favourite profiles are @2mayaz; @coutureisbeyond; @marioabad; @louispisano; and @schiaplicious (of course, I am a Schiaparelli fan).

What are your favourite fashion shows of all time? First up, one that you attended.
A special place in my heart for the first ones I ever saw in person: first, Fall 2021 couture at Schiaparelli. I am a huge fan of Elsa and now Daniel Roseberry. That was the first time I saw a couture piece in person. A few days after Schiaparelli I was invited to see Valentino Fall 2021 couture. That was a trip to remember! It happened after Covid and that show embodied amazing clothes, location, music (Cosima has the voice of an angel), and atmosphere.

And what about an older one you didn't actually attend?
I will cheat on this one and mention two. Both by McQueen: *Horn of Plenty*, which in my opinion is perfect and the best fashion show of all time; the second is *Plato's Atlantis*, which is the second-best fashion show of all time. If you want me to talk about these two shows, I will need more pages.

Who are your fashion-critic mentors?
I don't have a mentor, but I do admire certain fashion critics, like Alexander Fury or Robin Givhan. She has an unparalleled way with words and gets to the core so swiftly and precisely. I also love the work of Vanessa Friedman.

What did you think of the infamous review by Virginie Mouzat in *Le Figaro* that destroyed Tom Ford's show in 2011?
I am not a huge fan of it; it just comes across as mean. It is OK not to like something, but at the end of the day, delivery matters. If you go to Instagram or Twitter today and see what people think about some collections, Virginie's article would not seem that controversial at all. Virginie maybe forgot that the clothes are what matters; there were some personal digs towards Tom.

John Galliano insults you on the terrace of La Perle. What do you do?
Take my phone and hit record.

Louis Pisano
@louispisano on Instagram

Which media do you use for your fashion criticism?
Instagram. It gets a bit messy at times when there's so much politics involved in working with brands in other capacities and also being tied to major publications.

How do you define your role?
It depends on the day, but I would say I'm a personality, because everything I do – whether it's writing or creating content – is about my personality.

What excites you during fashion week?
Knowing that I get to see so many friends, thinking of all the gossip at lunch and messy dinners and drunken late nights spent dancing makes it all worth it. And of course, the clothes, what we will be wearing next season, who I am going to be next season.

What do you expect from a good fashion show?
An amazing soundtrack and an ambience. I've seen a lot of great collections with shitty music that created no ambience and affected how you (or at least I) perceived the experience, and I've seen a lot of not-so-great collections that have been saved by how they were presented.

How do you go about conveying your enthusiasm?
'I'M SCREAMING.' Usually I'm not *actually* screaming.

What made you want to examine fashion?
Growing up as a very obviously gay kid, it was the one thing out of all my interests that people took my advice on. I just ran with it.

What is the polite way of saying that a show was awful?
Polite? Have you ever read my tweets or IG Stories? I'm kidding, It truly depends on the situation. I'm learning how to be more tactful because as a certain editor of a certain magazine I may or may not work with said: 'Here at [redacted] magazine, if we don't like something, we don't talk about it.' All my life, my problem has been not having a filter, but usually I'll just say, 'It was a great experience.'

What row do you sit in at Dior?
Sitting!? LOL. If I'm sitting anywhere it's across the street from the venue, on the terrace of a café.

Which other accounts influence you, and on which platforms?
If you had asked me this a few months ago I would have had a whole list to name, but honestly, at the moment, none. I feel like the fashion-criticism community on Instagram was for a moment on the same path and then the first wave of us got all these amazing opportunities and found our lanes. I used to examine so many accounts and be like, I wish I was more educated on historical references like this person or I wish I could create review graphics like that person, but then I realized the thing that really works for me is just being me, as messy and chaotic as that is. I'd rather be that and learning as I go along rather than comparing myself to other accounts

What are your favourite fashion shows of all time? First up, one that you attended.
Jean Paul Gaultier, Spring/Summer 2013. In my fashion-blogger era I snuck in. It was the first JPG show I ever went to, and it was incredible and sexy: all these hot boys with beards and corsets walking to 'Vogue' and Amanda Lear closing the show. The energy was unlike any show I had been to: people were standing up, dancing, whistling and cheering and yelling. It was like being in a club in the middle of the day.

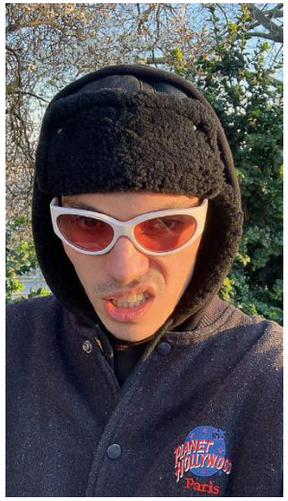
And what about an older one you didn't actually attend?
Dior, cruise 2010 by Galliano, in Shanghai! I literally watch it every week, the soundtrack, the staging, the clothes. Ayeyeeeee… they really snapped with that show.

Who are your fashion-critic heroes?
Evan Ross Katz, PamBoy, Mario Abad. They are all people in this space who had a profound effect on how I approach what I do.

What did you think of the infamous review by Virginie Mouzat in *Le Figaro* that destroyed Tom Ford's show in 2011?
I mean, she *really* let him have it. It's like, just when you think she'd landed her hardest blow, she punched even harder. When she described the collection as inventory for a not-yet-accepted-by-the-fashion-industry Kim Kardashian, I truly lost my mind. That whole review makes me laugh and cry at the same time. It's a play-by-play train wreck. Tragic but comic – a tragicomedy.

John Galliano insults you on the terrace of La Perle. What do you do?
First I'm reminding this bitch he's banned, then I'm tweeting about it.

'*Polite*? Have you ever read my tweets or IG Stories? I'm kidding, I mean it depends on the situation. I'm learning how to be more tactful.'



Elias (Lyas) Medini
@ly-as on Instagram

Which media do you use for your fashion criticism?
Instagram.

How do you define your role?
Fashion commentator? I don't really analyse the show; what I offer is more an ironic and referenced reading of a collection.

What excites you during fashion week?
The passion and energy that fashion weeks bring to Paris or Milan, London or New York. Fashion brings people together and being able to dance with Cardi B at midnight before going home to your tiny apartment at 2am to eat microwaved leftover pasta reinforces the idea that anything is possible.

What do you expect from a good fashion show?
Like a total work of art, I expect fashion that's stimulating. And for me that often comes from the story that a show is telling. If there's only technique, it's not art; if there's only story and no technique, it's not fashion. A good show has to find the perfect balance.

How do you convey your enthusiasm?
Is it ever really conveyed?

What made you want to examine fashion?
To begin with, to share my enthusiasm or – occasionally – my disgust. And then to explain to people who watch my Stories what I see in fashion. Bringing fashion to a wider audience, making it accessible through humour and popculture or political references. So, yes, I can comment on a Casablanca show by talking about Nicolas Sarkozy's Libyan money.[1]

What is the polite way of saying that a show was awful?
I rarely find a polite way of saying a show is awful, but as I have to choose one, I'd say: 'This is some fu*king disrespectful sh*t. I don't ever wanna see that bullsh*t again.'[2]

What row do you sit in at Dior?
Dior by Raf Simons? Front row. Dior by John Galliano? Front row. Dior by Hedi Slimane? Front row. Dior by Kim Jones or Maria-Grazia Chiuri? Any row because I wouldn't go.

Which other accounts influence you, and on which platforms?
@osamachabbi. He comments and analyses fashion in depth, more technically than I can do, and I find his investment in his Stories fascinating. He is so passionate.

What are your favourite fashion shows of all time? First up, one that you attended.
Vetements, Spring/Summer 2019. The show was under the *périphérique*,[3] a place that was the polar opposite of the idea I had of a show. It was in June, it was hot, and I was sweating about the idea of being turned away at the entrance. I had already fare-dodged on the train to Paris, so I thought I might as well try to sneak into Vetements, too. After making a scene at the entrance when I was refused entry they finally let me in, and I understood: fashion was a method of self-expression, just as much as cinema, painting or dance. I left with a new passion and Vetements-customized bottle of Evian. I'm still mad at my mother who threw it away 'because it was empty'.

And what about an older one you didn't actually attend?
Plato's Atlantis. I dream about it sometimes – because Alexander McQueen; because Nick Knight; because 'Bad Romance'; because technology in the service of art; because he told a story of a dream of nature; because I dream of buying Armadillo heels and exhibiting them in a glass cube in the middle of my studio.

Who are your fashion-critic heroes?
I don't know if you've heard of him, but he's on TV now and again, and he's written a couple of books: @loicprigent.

What did you think of the infamous review by Virginie Mouzat in *Le Figaro* that destroyed Tom Ford's show in 2011?
The balls! I am for honest fashion criticism – even if it's subjective – that's committed and impartial (perhaps not in this case). It's just being lost more and more. It's become impossible for journalists to say what they really think about a collection or a designer. They're scared: the advertisers and next invitations are like a muzzle. It's sad. #fashionnightmare.

John Galliano insults you on the terrace of La Perle. What do you do?
I order a pastis at €3.50 – shit! Credit card minimum: €15. Never mind, I'll take the bottle and will share it with John. Maybe that will calm his soul.

1. In 2012, news site Mediapart revealed the existence of an agreement in which the regime of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi would provide €50 million in illegal donations to then-French president Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007 election campaign in exchange for access to trade deals. The sprawling affair metastasized to involve a cast of ministers, government officials businesspeople, and lawyers. Sarkozy has been charged by the French authorities with passive corruption, illegal campaign financing, receiving Libyan public funds, and criminal association. The case against the ex-president is yet to be heard; he denies all charges.

2. In English in the original French text.

3. The Boulevard Périphérique, the ring road encircling Paris, was built between 1958 and 1973 on land previously occupied by shanty towns and 19th-century fortifications. The fastest recorded circumnavigation of its 35.04 kilometres is credited to Swedish biker Ghostrider: in 2003, he went round in 9 minutes and 57 seconds at an average speed of 221 kilometres an hour.

'I had already fare-dodged on the train to Paris, so I thought I might as well try to sneak into Vetements, too.'

‘The puffer jacket has become as important as underwear.’

Dingyun Zhang on dreaming up paper sneakers for Kobe, designing them for Kanye, and the fearlessness that comes with wearing his signature colossal puffers.

Interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist
Photographs by Drew Vickers
Styling by Vanessa Reid

From left to right: Dean wears a puffer jacket by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, black overalls by M.C.Overalls, and his own shoes. Shane wears a reversible puffer vest by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, beige cotton overalls by The Contemporary Wardrobe, and his own shoes. Skye wears a cropped puffer jacket by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, khaki cotton overalls by The Contemporary Wardrobe, and her own shoes. Tanya wears long puffer jacket and windbreaker by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, overalls by The Arc, and her own shoes. Owin wears a reversible puffer vest by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, khaki cotton overalls by The Arc, and his own shoes. Zack wears an reversible puffer vest by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, khaki cotton overalls by The Arc, and his own shoes.

Dexter wears a reversible puffer vest, terroir-print net cape in technical fabric and puffer helmet with detachable visor by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, and his own shoes.

Kya wears a long puffer jacket by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang.

Kya wears a cropped cocoon puffer jacket and
puffer helmet with detachable visor by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang.

Liza wears puffer jacket with sculptural back details and
puffer helmet with detachable visor by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang.

Orlagh wears a puffer helmet with detachable visor by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, white overalls by M.C.Overalls, and her own shoes.

Dexter wears a reversible puffer vest, terroir-print net cape, and puffer helmet with detachable visor by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang.

Zack wears reversible puffer vest and puffer helmet with
detachable visor by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang,
khaki cotton overalls by The Arc, and his own shoes.
Shane wears reversible puffer vest and puffer helmet with
detachable visor by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang,
beige cotton overalls by The Contemporary Wardrobe, and his own shoes.
Owin wears oversized reversible puffer vest and puffer helmet with
detachable visor by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang,
khaki cotton overalls by The Arc, and his own shoes.

Orlagh wears puffer vest with porthole pattern and
windbreaker by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang,
white overalls by M.C.Overalls, and her own shoes.

Haley wears puffer jacket with sculptural back details, puffer jacket with porthole pattern and windbreaker by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, black overalls by M.C.Overalls, and her own shoes.

Dexter wears reversible puffer vest and puffer helmets with detachable visors worn as shoes by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, and beige cotton overalls by The Contemporary Wardrobe.

Rosie wears puffer vest with porthole pattern and windbreaker by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang.

Zack wears camouflage reversible puffer gilet by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, and khaki cotton overalls by The Arc.
Skye wears cropped puffer jacket by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, and khaki cotton overalls by The Contemporary Wardrobe.
Shane wears reversible puffer vest by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang, and beige cotton overalls by The Contemporary Wardrobe.

Rosie wears oversized puffer jacket and puffer vests with porthole pattern, cropped cocoon puffer jacket, windbreaker, and puffer helmet with detachable visor by Moncler + Dingyun Zhang.

Models: Dean, Dexter, Haley, Kya, Liza, Orlagh, Owin, Rosie, Shane, Skye, Tanya, and Zack, all at People-file. Make-up: Lucy Bridge at Streeters. Hair: Amidat Giwa at Bryant Artists. Nails: Lauren Michelle Pires at Future Rep. Set design: Andrew Clarkson at Bryant Artists. Production: Bellhouse Markes. Executive producer: Araminta Markes. Producer: Ella Girardot. Photography assistants: Alessandro Tranchini, Shahram Saadat, Max Hayter. Styling assistants: Suzannah Snow, Nathan Fox. Make-up assistants: Kyle Dominic, Jana Reininger. Hair assistants: Gordon Chapples, Jennifer Chan. Set-design assistant: Lucy Anstey. Production intern: Zehra Rizvi.

In 2016, Kanye West flew Dingyun Zhang to his HQ in Calabasas, California, for a meeting. West was looking for 'incredible, highly sensitive people' to join Yeezy's design team; Zhang, then still only a student in London, was hired the same day. It was an instinctive choice that was quick to pay off: Zhang went on to work on the hugely popular Yeezy 700 Wave Runner series, among other commercial successes.

A free-thinking visionary with a radical approach to practical design, Zhang has established himself as one of fashion's fastest-rising designers in the two years since he graduated with his MA from Central Saint Martins. His colossal puffers and oversized track pants are coveted among the fashion elite, worn by the likes of Gigi Hadid and Kim Kardashian, turning up in *Vogue*, and going viral on Instagram. They also caught the eye of Moncler maestro Remo Ruffini, who chose Zhang to create a collection for Spring/Summer 2022.

Zhang's trajectory towards early success can be traced back to his childhood creative experiments in China and his time at a fine-art college in Somerset, UK, where he says, he learned that making art made him both happy and free. It is a creative liberty he continues by subverting conventional design rules in his clothing, and using next-generation bio-materials and futuristic silhouettes to show how creativity can be reimagined to help us better navigate the world. During a recent whirlwind trip from Beijing to Europe, Zhang spoke with curator and Serpentine Galleries artistic director Hans Ulrich Obrist about turning high art into wearable fashion, creating for the metaverse, and designing puffer jackets for all seasons.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: What was it that first triggered your interest in fashion?
Dingyun Zhang: As a child I was heavily into Japanese animation and manga, and that combined with my interest in footwear design. Those were the key childhood influences that motivated my interest in fashion. My parents not buying me the sneakers that I wanted as a child also motivated me to design my own basketball shoes. I had to wait until Chinese New Year for maybe the one pair that I wanted, so I would evaluate details and designs, then create my own cardboard and paper versions of the basketball shoes and sneakers that I couldn't have.

I read that the Nike flagship in Beijing was really important for you as a kid.
It had this big poster around the building, and when I walked past it on the way to school, I would see the latest shoes on different basketball players.[1] I was inspired by the Kobe basketball shoes at the age of 12. For me, sneakers were like museum objects, to the extent that I couldn't actually bring myself to wear the ones I bought. I was always sketching and imagining what the next Kobe shoe would be like, and making my own paper versions. Fashion was a way for me to experiment with different shapes and textiles within the world I was creating for my footwear designs.

What prompted you to move to the UK? It has had such an exciting fashion scene for many years and it just continues generation after generation to be very magnetic. Obviously, you went to Central Saint Martins.
I first came to the UK when I was studying for GCSEs. I already had this feeling as a kid that I had been born to express myself and have a creative vision, and I thought it would be great to learn how to expand and define my ideas in a competitive environment, especially in the UK's art and fashion schools. Although I always wanted to go back to China to develop a creative entity here.

Can you describe your time at Central Saint Martins? Because there was a moment when you studied art. I'm coming from the art world, so I'm particularly interested in how you combined these two fields.
My experience with my art teachers and the environment at Saint Martins was life-changing for many reasons. I always received honest and motivating feedback from my tutors on the BA; some of the relationships I formed there, I will have for life. I heard a lot about Louise Wilson and her legacy, but unfortunately I never had the chance to meet her. I used to create sculptures and paint landscape portraits, and in fashion I like to transform these ideas into wearable art. I was experimenting in China with textiles, screen-printing and that kind of thing, before I started making garments and came to the UK.

Which visual artists inspire you? I read that David Hockney and Robert Rauschenberg were important to you when you were studying art.
It is what those artists do with collage –

'My parents not buying me the sneakers that I wanted as a child motivated me to design my own basketball shoes using cardboard and paper.'

that is how I start designing every collection, every look. I start by doing a moodboard, making something abstract by mixing different media. It can be metal; it can be fabric; it can be cut-outs from a magazine or something that I paint; then I combine them. It doesn't clearly lead to garments, specifically – it's more a moodboard.

You've also been influenced by photographs of rural life, of farms, and a fashion that might be called 'emergency fashion', the fashion of survival, the opposite of luxury. Many years ago, I did a project with the artist Nancy Spero on emergency fashions, and I have always been really interested in this idea of fashion made from necessity.
That was my first collection on the BA course, inspired by Jackie Nickerson's photos of farm workers in southern Africa and how they create their own looks with the materials they can find, which are always functional. Functionality and wearability are the priority in my lines.

Did you have mentors in China? Were you interested in the history of fashion when you were growing up there? Did you have access to explore that?
I didn't really have any introduction to European fashion designers at that time, but I did have my own culture and understanding of fashion thanks to historic Chinese clothing such as the cheongsam dress. When I was young, I used to visit vintage markets in Beijing with my cousins where I was exposed to unique and intricate Chinese antiques and accessories, such as coral bracelets and Qing dynasty porcelain vases. This sparked my interest in form and sculpture, as did the Terracotta Army sculptures that are so important to Chinese history and culture. In terms of textiles, I was drawn to silk embroidery that used Chinese silk threads for designs that were vivid and lifelike, intricate and complicated, and dreamlike screen printing that sparked my interest when I was young. All that showed me what fashion textiles could become. My contemporary interest in fashion was mainly derived from basketball and hip-hop culture, specifically Allen Iverson and how he dressed and influenced the image and style of basketballers in his era. Tinker Hatfield, a footwear designer at Nike, was an early inspiration for me; he was inspired to design the Air Max 1 with the air bubble after visiting the Pompidou Centre.[2] His courage to show what was previously considered to be ugly and hidden inspired me to take risks with my own designs.

That sense of rebellion was even apparent at CSM, right? You were gravitating towards the notion of elevating streetwear and its universe while your classmates were fixated on learning to become 'fashion designers' and make 'beautiful' clothes. Obviously, that has changed a lot recently as the intersection between fashion and streetwear has disappeared.
As you might expect, most students were focused on making clothes that were considered tasteful by high fashion or past couture traditions. I was more focused on just being myself and creating clothes that anyone could wear, not worrying too much about the surrounding environment or allowing that to affect my personal design and development. Some people in that environment found it difficult to understand references from the street. Only a few people from that socioeconomic background have the chance explore their potential at fashion school. Recently, we have seen barriers being broken between streetwear and luxury with the collabs, like Supreme and Louis Vuitton. At the time [2017], it was so revolutionary even though we could see how high luxury needs the relevance of streetwear, which could almost be viewed as a counterculture. I never consciously used fashion or youth culture as a tool to rebel against tradition; I just used it as a means of self-expression throughout my personal journey. It was a desire of mine to have something I would cherish and appreciate. Now, as a designer, I want to create that dream for other young people.

What is your view of the term 'streetwear'? Nigo recently rejected the term, saying it should be called 'lifewear', as the term streetwear is too often used to infer a lesser or lower form of design creativity and intricacy.
I think 'lifewear' is a good term for it. We can't change the history of streetwear's reputation; the term has been used to describe clothes worn mostly by people of a particular class and lifestyle, or used to label cultures that don't conform to taste or high fashion. It would be more powerful to re-evaluate what we consider streetwear, and redefine it according to materials, production, social influence, sustainability, and specific design detailing. This will help people who used to look down on streetwear and its designers in a negative way find how to consider the influence and ingenuity that comes from the street and hip-hop culture.

The first in this series of interviews with younger or emerging designers that I've been doing for *System* was with Virgil Abloh. He said that streetwear was dead because the differentiation between luxury fashion and streetwear had been eradicated. Is streetwear dead?
I think the late Virgil Abloh answered that question better than I ever could. It is true that ready-to-wear and streetwear are the same for me; I think we have moved on from any differentiation, especially with how most of society dresses, with the need for comfortable everyday pieces made in good-quality fabrics aligned with particular brands or designers. Virgil opened the gate for me, too.

I met Virgil when we did a project with Kanye and Jacques Herzog in Miami in 2013. You met Kanye, too, in the second year of your BA and became involved with Yeezy. All roads seem to lead to Kanye! I'm curious about your first meeting; it seems like there was an instant connection. Then you began designing footwear for Yeezy, which was your dream when you were in China. I'm curious about the idea of articulating a vision as a creative director when, like Kanye and Virgil, you're not from a traditional fashion background. Are fashion brands these days more about curating?
My first moments with Yeezy were eye-opening because I was exposed to these free-thinking ways of creating footwear and garments. It was an interdisciplinary environment where I worked on many things in addition to footwear. Meeting Kanye, working on Yeezy felt like a natural design relationship. I went from paper and cardboard to working with a factory that could bring my ideas and dreams to reality. Making a real shoe from scratch with the support of an experienced staff at Yeezy and Adidas was a dream come true. Kanye is the most amazing creative director, all without coming from a conventional fashion background. I didn't have a traditional introduction to fashion, either, but it is possible to become a creative director without that background by following what you believe in and being willing to develop a story.

I was talking to Valerio Olgiati the other day and Kanye had commissioned him to build a city near Atlanta. Kanye also has a futuristic idea for a campus in Wyoming where, before the lockdown, you were planning to move. What are your plans now?
After I graduated, I was supposed to move to Wyoming to continue in the design world with Kanye. But then came Covid and plans changed, and everything was cancelled. I couldn't get a visa; we were working on the visa for almost a year. Currently, I am working on production in China, but Kanye is still one of my biggest heroes and mentors; everything I have done with him is something I remember fondly. I've never actually visited the campus myself, but it looks super cool. Every successful brand creates a community that aligns with it and goes beyond just clothes and products; Yeezy has really achieved this. Kanye has always been about creating communities, clothing and footwear; promoting symbols of that lifestyle, progress with Black Future Month, building the campus, and other projects. Yeezy has been working on a whole value system.

As well as Yeezy, there is also your recent collection with Moncler. What is your first memory of that brand?
I got my first Moncler jacket in classic bluish purple in 2013. That introduced me to quintessential Moncler – the detailing they are known for, pocket placement and high-quality trims, the stitching, all the back stitching. That showed me the attention to detail in the craftsmanship, unlike outerwear from other brands. Working on a Moncler collaboration gives you incredible access to production capabilities that we could only imagine before. The materials, the technical skills, the platform were eye-opening.

You've described your collection with Moncler as 'heritage, environment, metamorphosis, illusion and timeless'. Can you talk a little more about these five notions? I am very interested in the environmental dimension of your work as we are living in an age of mass extinction, and it is so important that we think about sustainability and durability. How do you address

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the environmental crisis, and sustainable use of materials? I am interested in how we can change; the world needs a radical change.
I am interested by people living in harsh conditions because that plays on their clothes and their culture. These harsh conditions inspired me to explore waste and the way that clothing protects the wearer; I've always used this as inspiration. I've wanted to develop my textile research to benefit the wider fashion industry and reduce waste, like not using conventional nylons, but researching biodegradable textiles with nylon-like properties to protect the wearer in harsh environments. I've also been making alternatives to leather, too; one is a neoprene bonded with a fabric to create this leather look and feel. My next project is to develop a replacement for the filling in down jackets, to maybe replace the duck feathers by using polyester to create an air jacket that is equally desirable. I also want to develop non-woven microfibre filling for my commercial pieces, maybe from recycled textiles. This idea is important to my creative process: by producing less, you reduce consumption, but that scarcity also creates a culture of demand for the products.

You've said that design should be functional and long-lasting and that also means fine craftsmanship and using sustainable materials. Can you talk about this long-term approach, which is the opposite of fashion, in a way?
With all my designs, I really work on the detailing, from a zip to pocket placement, to keep them functional in the long-term. When I design a jacket, I have friends wear it for a day or a week, and then they give me feedback. Is the pocket placement annoying? Does it bother you? And then I just constantly keep changing it, working the piece over and over and over again.

Is the puffer jacket important in relation to that? Does it represent a type of cultural artefact when considering the foundations of your creative DNA? Where does it sit for you in today's fashion landscape?
From a young age, I was exposed to many traditional Mongolian garments made from animal hides, such as the *terleg*, a type of coat, and the *gutal,* which is a type of boot.[3] These provoked my interest in design and in pieces from specific ethnic groups living in harsh climates – almost like their version of streetwear – pulling together elements from their environments to create expressions of their surroundings and culture. For me, the puffer jacket is the same thing, reflecting this relationship between clothes and culture. The puffer jacket has become as important as underwear. It is needed in everyone's wardrobe, and its versatility in construction means that a lot of brands can take part in this trend. The fact that it has become a trend in recent years shows how influential references to street and hip-hop culture are to the fashion industry.

In a recent interview [in *032c*] with Charlie Fox, you were asked about the weather conditions in which this garment can be worn, and you said: '100% industrial gray cloud, also known as "weather on antidepressants". Cloud drone: similar to above but with the same cumulonimbus clouds emitting a ferocious electrical drone, best mimicked by the album *Special Low Frequency Version* by Earth at maximum volume. That phase of winter when the sun stops giving a fuck due to pollution/radiation and is as weak as the crack of light under a door in a dark corridor.' This made me curious about the role of weather in your work, and also what kind of music you are listening to.
I try to have a range of cuts for the puffer jacket so they can exist as all-season pieces, especially in cities where the weather can be temperamental. One of my puffer coats can be in the wardrobe all year round. I also explored this creativity to serve the story by using deep-sea creatures as references to add holes and open up the garment – to abstract the human form, while allowing air to reach the body at certain points. As for music, I listen to all types: rock, punk, rap, piano… all combined together, no particular genre, but mostly hip-hop. Working with Kanye and listening to his music influenced me even more.

'The confidence of people to wear my helmets in the street is almost like a self-portrait for me. It shows optimism, a fearlessness that I have myself.'

Looking at your Moncler collab one last time, it is very complex and very colourful and has these really sculptural pieces that are both works of art and deeply functional. What is your next step after Moncler? Your next project?
The silhouettes of the helmets, jackets and pants all provided a new perspective on the Moncler signature down jacket – what I describe as organic futurism meets traditional craftsmanship. We have evolved a language of forms and materials for footwear and apparel to transcend the seasons and make sure the story can continue connecting with people over the long term. The collections need to work throughout spring and summer, not only in winter, so this is the challenge we are facing now – studying materials and forms to fit in with summer categories.

Do you doodle and make sketches, or do you always work on the computer?
With footwear and apparel, when I have an idea, I just do a quick sketch. I always keep a notebook with a pen next to my bed, so that at any time I can write down an idea. If I don't put it down then after two minutes, it's forgotten, so I always do a quick rough sketch and return to it later to refine the design.

Instagram is an important communication tool for you to connect with the industry and the arts as a whole, and all your followers. What does the app represent to you and what is the internet's role for you as a fashion designer?
It's important for people to engage with my work in real time, and with Instagram I get to see the types of people with whom my work resonates. The internet has helped me understand who and what I am really designing for. I have been able to connect with other artists who share my creative values, and who create 3D renderings, paintings, animations of my clothing.

Let's talk about your collaboration with art director and 3D artist Antoni Tudisco. Together, you've worked on a series of 3D-rendered film stills and short animations that feature your work with Yeezy reimagined in abstract landscapes. Does the project represent a form of branding and a powerful communications tool that can exist outside of the classic fashion-week schedule?
One day it'll be possible to create a digital fashion show with 3D-rendered garments and models, but in the collab with Antoni, I wanted to provide a different perspective on my garments in a virtual world. Antoni and I came together by chance through Instagram, and the experience was great. He is really talented and the work we produced was a chance to show my garments in an abstract way, with fibreglass-like materials and super-inflated forms.

Do you have any unrealized projects, visions for the future, or things you have dreamed of but haven't been able to do yet?
Developing the idea of getting involved with the metaverse, I would like to create unrealistic and abstract garments in the 3D world and then see how we could make them come to life in the real world. That is my dream.

How do you want to influence the future? Do you want your work to inspire young designers, particularly those growing up in non-fashion-oriented backgrounds like yourself?
The only responsibility young designers have is to show their work in innovative ways that are honest to their vision and their stories, when the timing and circumstances are right. The near future, for me, is all about scaling the experimental while meeting the demand for my products. Collaborations have allowed me to do this, but in the future, I'd like to develop into one of the leading outerwear brands at my market level.

Are you still running all of your production through China?
The whole company is currently based in China. I have almost unlimited sourcing and production capabilities here, and it is incredible. The level and quality of the work is mind-blowing; it's constantly improving and is now comparable to other countries. 'Made in China' is starting to feel expensive.

What is your advice to a young design student? What would you advise your younger self?
I always want to push the borders of what fashion can be in the future. I like a multi-disciplinary approach, connecting with people from non-fashion backgrounds, seeing things as one family with many branches. Students and artists around the world have already begun to play around with my creations to express themselves. When people wear my work, it shows optimism; a fearlessness that I have myself. The confidence of people to wear my helmets in the streets is almost like a self-portrait for me.

One last question: what would you design for extra-terrestrials?
When they land, I would have to design the coolest collection to impress them – because they've always inspired me!

Introduction text: Daphne Milner.

1. The 1,200-square-metre Nike flagship in Beijing opened in August 2007.

2. Sneaker-design legend Tinker Hatfield trained as an architect before joining Nike in 1981 to design offices, showrooms and retail spaces. After moving into product design in 1985, he began working on the Air Jordan line, in collaboration with Michael Jordan, in 1988. His debut was the Air Jordan 3, which was also the first to feature the Jumpman logo.

3. *Gutals* are traditional knee-high, heelless boots, made of thick leather. They feature curled-up toes, a feature variously explained as one that allows devout Buddhists to move without kicking up earth (frowned upon for disturbing the 'earth's blessed sleep) or helps riders keep their feet in their stirrups. Lookmongolia.com also has another, simpler explanation: *gutals* 'are so thick and rigid that they would be almost impossible to walk in if they were flat.'

‘How do you feel in your Gucci suit?’

System **asks some of our favourite menswear stylists to answer a simple question.**

‘I feel like I’ve really got it together, man!’
Mel Ottenberg

Photographed by Lachlan Bailey

‘I feel so good I could wear it twice.’
Ib Kamara

Photographed by Ib Kamara

‘I feel extremely grateful.’ Alastair McKimm

Photographed by Mario Sorrenti

Hat, rings and phone, stylist’s own.

‘I feel like organizing my accessories – including the ‘men’s fun thongs’ and ‘feather boas’ drawers. Nothing better than getting dressed up in the office.’ Harry Lambert

Photographed by Daniel Archer

How do you feel in your Gucci suit?

‘I feel like Julian Kaye in *American Gigolo*.’ Jaheel Weaver

Photographed by Quil Lemons

Jewellery by Bulgari and Chrome Hearts. Cap by Awake NY.
Photography assistant: Matthew Yoseary

How do you feel in your Gucci suit?

‘I feel like a lounge lizard.’
Tom Guinness

Scarf by Aviakit Lewis Leathers, bow tie and watch, model’s own.

Photographed by Britt Lloyd

How do you feel in your Gucci suit?

‘I feel like I’m in a Takeshi Kitano movie.’ Jason Rider

Photographed by Nero

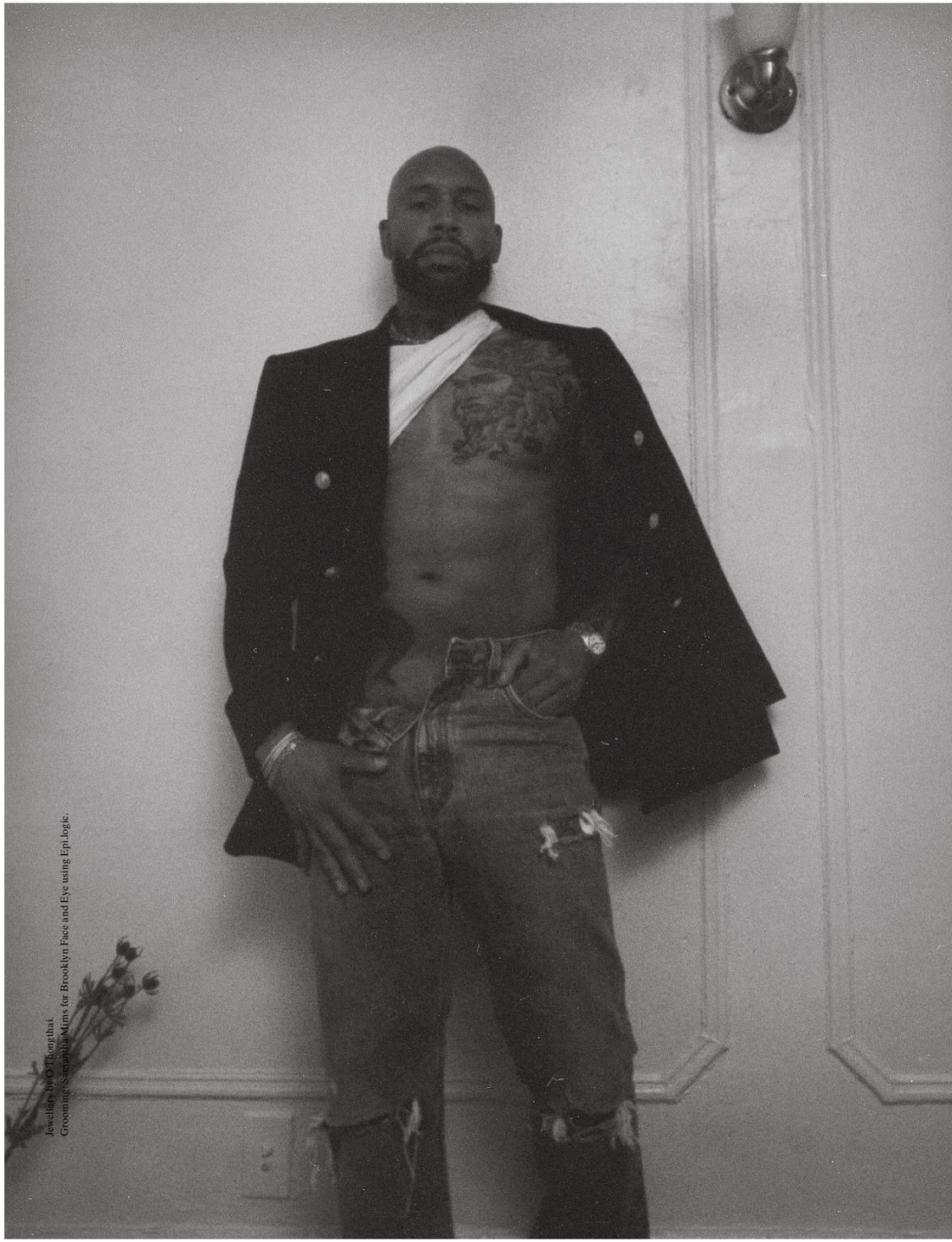
Sweater, vest, T-shirt and shoes, stylist’s own.
Hair by Nero at MA+Group using Oribe Hair. Make-up: Sena Murahashi using Chanel Beauty.

‘I feel like it was made for me, and less stiff than other suits.’ Ola Ebiti

Photographed by Cameron Ugbodu

‘I feel sexy.’ Matthew Henson

Photographed by Xavier Scott Marshall



Jewellery by OTTwengthai.
Grooming: Samantha Mims for Brooklyn Face and Eye using Epi.logic.

‘I feel rich.’ Carlos Nazario

Photographed by Alasdair McLellan

Jewellery, artist’s own.
Photo Assistants: Lex Kembery, Simon Mackinlay.

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The Interiors Questionnaire: Peter Marino

By Loïc Prigent

Photograph: Manolo Yllera.

What is the most frequent misconception about you?
That I'm 55.

What do you save first from your burning house?
My pets.

You've got a few more minutes, what else do you save from your burning house?
My paintings, bronzes, rare books, and drawings.

What is the first thing you tell your new recruits?
'Welcome to Wonderland.'

How much time should a Zoom meeting last to be efficient?
10 minutes. MAX.

Who is your architectural role model?
Philip Johnson.

Who is your fashion role model?
Karl Lagerfeld.

Who is your business role model?
David Geffen.

What is your favourite piece of furniture of all time?
My rough stone box in blackened bronze.

I have zero budget, but I need to find you a nice gift that you'll really like. What should I get?
Make your own artwork.

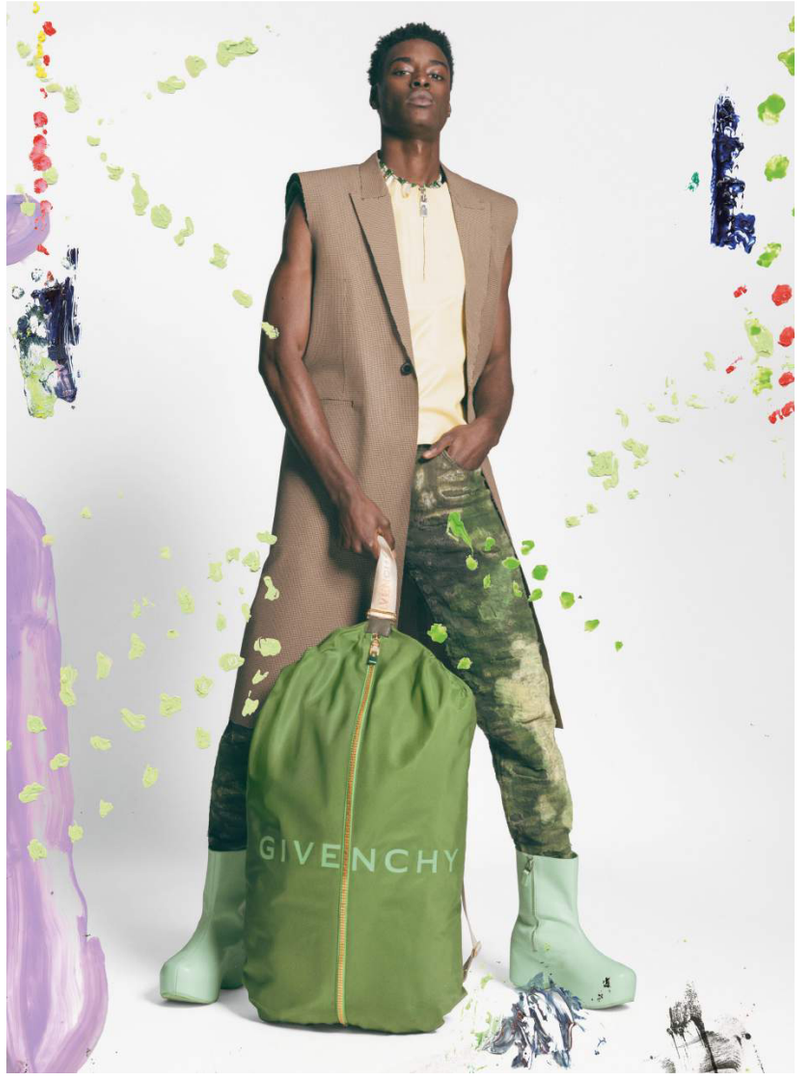
What is still on your 'to do' list?
Build an opera house.

What are your three rules for a perfect room?
Art, art and more art.

What is your rule for the perfect bedroom?
Total darkness.

What are your favourite textures in the new Dior 30 Montaigne?
The scarred white squares floating on the 18th-century wooden panels, and the back-painted mirrors à la Poussin.

How is it to work with Mr Arnault and Mr Beccari on a project like Dior 30 Montaigne?
COOL.



GIVENCHY

SS22 CAMPAIGN
BABACAR AND HE CONG PHOTOGRAPHED BY HEJI SHIN
IN COLLABORATION WITH JOSH SMITH

LOUIS VUITTON